

Spring 5-9-2017

Beyond Dichotomies: Acknowledging and Disrupting the Social Worlds of Tracked Schooling through Identity-Focused Literacy Practices

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Beyond Dichotomies: Acknowledging and Disrupting the Social Worlds
of Tracked Schooling through Identity-Focused Literacy Practices

Krista M. Bowen

Kennesaw State University

1 March 2017

Drs. Megan Adams, Ryan Rish, and Nita Parris

Dedication

This work would not be possible without the students who have generously shared their experiences and struggles growing up in our schools. With each interview and observation, I heard students contending with a competitive system that expects perfection and performance, and sometimes inhibits exploration and growth. Their stories of the way our schools have become spaces fraught with pressure and anxiety have forever changed the way I see my classroom. Within the confines of institutional structures, I hope to draw from their experiences and continue to create opportunities that ease the rigors of competitive schooling and that enact permeable barriers between the selves students perform in the classroom and those they construct out of the classroom. I dedicate this work to the students who continue to shape who I am as a teacher and a person and who open my eyes every day to the worlds they navigate. Fifth period, this is for you: “I’m trying to stay woke.”

Acknowledgements

I feel so grateful for all that I have learned from professors and peers in four years of doctoral work at Kennesaw State University. My teaching will forever be changed by this journey we took together. I still think of that second Monday in June, four long years ago, when the English education cohort sat for the first time in Dr. Ryan Rish's Theory of Writing class. I think most of us did not blink for the first hour. As he unwound a century of theory and theorists and challenged us to rethink the opportunities for writing we present in our classrooms, he also consoled us with the idea that we were now "drinking from the fire hose," or fervently consuming the theory that underlies English education. That summer, our cohort gathered in the halls on breaks, trying to synthesize the enormity of what we learned from Dr. Rish. Wide-eyed and open-hearted, we truly found praxis, thinking through the ways theory would inform our teaching when the first days of school arrived. All along the way, the cohort model was one of the most valuable parts of our experience – the teachers in the English cohort shared our experiences across many different teaching contexts and challenged one another to reshape our own teaching, bringing back to our schools theory-informed literacy practices.

Throughout my study, I also relied on the knowledge, insight and care of Dr. Megan Adams. As the study moved through each dark corner, Dr. Adams helped shine the light that let me find my way. Her deep compassion for students in our educational system helped me to make important decisions about the instructional design and methodology with my gaze on the students I hoped to help. For teacher-researchers, it can be hard to take a step back and understand the significance of what is happening in our classrooms. And Dr. Adams, through so many conversations about the struggles my students face in the competitive world of hierarchical

schooling, helped me see the forces that shape their experiences beyond the immediacy of day-to-day classroom life.

I am also so grateful for the time, energy and expertise that Dr. Nita Parris dedicated to the development of my study. It was in her Conceptual Frameworks class three years ago that she taught the foundational steps of the research process – in moving from conceptual framework to literature review. In her class, the seeds of this research study began to take life. She helped me conceptualize the intersections between historical, institutional and social structures that became the focus of the study. Without her class, I do not think I would have had the confidence to take on the different theoretical levels in the study. At every turn, she brought such positivity and encouragement, reassuring me that I could complete this study.

I can also not imagine this experience without the constant collaboration and motivation from my dear friend Kim Foster. How very lucky I sat down next to her at the very first orientation! On Saturday work sessions, long phone calls, and check-in texts, we made our way through the ardors of this process. But more importantly, I learned so much from the incredible teacher and person Kim is. Her kind heart and limitless compassion is the bedrock of her teaching, and I gained so much from her approach to the challenges of teaching.

The teachers and administrators at the high school where I teach provided so much support and insight as I worked through the study. They listened to me grapple with the problems impacting my classroom and challenged me to innovate new ways of countering those problems. In particular, Dr. Jeff Wheeler, my partner in co-teaching for six years, also takes a scrutinizing perspective on teaching and education, so he provided a constant sounding board for how I could amend the pedagogical principles and implementation in the study. He also provided a daily dose of optimism and a necessary reality check throughout the cycles of intervention.

My family and friends supported me throughout this long, long process; they listened to endless (ad nauseam) conversations about the social worlds of schooling, they supported and encouraged me, and they forgave me for the many times that I had to work through dinner plans. For the four summers that I worked through this study, I would like to thank my niece and nephew for their patience with their aunt's writing schedule when they just wanted to go swimming. And last on this list but first in my heart, I especially want to thank my amazing mother who stood by me from the initial thoughts to the last words. This study really started with everything she taught me about what it means to be a good person and a good teacher – to see the potential and beauty in everyone, to understand the lives unfolding around each of us, to always look for ways to contribute. Because she believes in me, I have learned what it takes to believe in my students. And even though we had to stop talking about my writer's block for several months, I could not have finished without her.

Abstract

This study sought to understand the influence of institutional structures of tracking and ability-grouping on the social worlds of an English language arts classroom – to understand how students construct and express identities against the backdrop of academic hierarchies, and to observe how these academic identities shape social patterns in the classroom. Drawing on dialogic and identity-focused literacy practices, this study used a design-based research methodology with ethnographic tools to observe the potential for literacy events to open more inclusive pathways to participation, beyond the social patterns that often marginalize students who do not fit conventional academic definitions of success. Data collection included video-recorded classroom observation, audio-recorded discussions, writing samples, and participant interviews to gain a wider perspective of students' experiences with school. Findings revealed the challenges of shifting classroom activity away from the “rulebook” by which students have learned to “do school,” particularly in upper high school where the ever-present anxiety over college admissions reinforces the competitive pressures of GPAs and academic level. Dialogic activities that flatten hierarchies and question meritocracy encountered resistance from students privileged by those structures, and also from students marginalized by them. Further research over a longer duration might improve the usefulness of the design and research, and lead to the flattening hierarchies within and beyond the classroom.

Keywords: Ability-grouping, tracking, educational hierarchies, meritocracy, figured worlds, social worlds, positioning, negotiations of positionality, identity-focused literacy practices, dialogic literacy practices, student-centered classroom communities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Problem

It is 1:27 am; I sit at my kitchen table beneath a feeble circle of light littered with piles of books and papers; the clock counts down like a metronome – three weeks until the first bell of another school year rings. I stare out the darkened window as if the murky blackness could foretell what the year will bring. For each of my eight years teaching, and for those teachers spending much of their summers trying and devising ways to move their practice forward, a new year brings hope and trepidation. I read and plan the humid months away, trying to solve some of the endemic problems that plague my classroom. Looking for ways to engage students, I challenge my teaching practices; I interrogate what worked and what didn't; I consider the pedagogical traps that perpetuate passive learning, the ones I try to avoid but inevitably crash into – the inauthentic assignments, the teacher-centered discourse, the perfunctory discussions, the overly-regulated projects that position students into an “apprenticeship of observation,” termed first by Lortie (1975, p. 65) to refer to the ways that years spent as passive students informs the passive teachers they become. The persistent pattern of traditional schooling Lortie calls an “ally of continuity rather than change” (p. 67).

Students, from nearly their first days in a kindergarten classroom, fall subject to pedagogies that remain stubbornly stable in our schools despite decades of progressive effort to shift classrooms towards sites of active engagement. Still, the desks face forward, the PowerPoints play on, the students stare off. According to Smagorinsky's (2011) interpretation of Lortie's apprenticeship of observation, these ingrained practices center on “rote learning more than on discovery, on passivity rather than activity, and on other practices that establish clear roles for teachers as knowledge dispensers and students as vessels to filled with information” (p. 79). The real problem, as Smagorinsky argues, is the degree to which students become

acculturated to passive learning – their position as passive learners becomes their central state of being in school, and one to which students cling, as it fits their “understanding of how to do school” (Dyson, 1984, p. 233). We can attribute the intractability of this hegemonic pattern with its fixed patterns of activity to norms that go far beyond one teacher and one set of students: conservative institutional hierarchies beget hesitancy in teachers to move beyond predictably didactic practices, and also beget the response of students resistant to change after years of acculturation to their role as passive observers.

Underneath that feeble circle of light at my kitchen table, I look within and beyond my classroom for the ways that the institution of school acculturates my students to passivity rather than activity – including the ways that my teaching works in ways complicit to these stubborn norms. Engeström (1985) argues that researchers, in order to understand human activity, must understand the very complexity of activity as a “culturally mediated phenomenon” (n.p.). This activity connects individual agency with the social context, and it extends between the present and the historical; it must be viewed as an ecology rather than a stasis. In thinking about the ways that schools position students, I consider the institutional structures connected to historical motivations and societal standards, and that positioning seems inevitably fixed and static. According to Smagorinsky (2011), school has changed remarkably little over the course of 1500 years of development since the first Sumerian lectures positioned students as receptacles for teacher-centered instruction. Institutional structures remain predictably sturdy, with norms of the past reproduced into ideas of the present. Teachers replicate these structures in their classrooms; *I* replicate them in my own classroom, with literacy practices that sanction the groups of students who have become well-apprenticed to “do school” and that estrange those who resist or refuse. In the high school where I teach, trying and mostly failing to provide authentic opportunities for

learning, I see an institution where social position hinges on dichotomies of success and failure, of achievement and inadequacy, of hopeful futures and despondent uncertainties. The dichotomy that most determines activity at the school where I teach is the one sanctioned by tracks, despite three decades of effort to detrack our nation's schools (Oakes, 2004; Gamoran, 2009; Lucas, 1999). Tracking of "high" and "regular" ability groups impacts the activity of institutions in determining courses, programs, and structures that perpetuate dichotomies of privilege and disadvantage. Tracking impacts the activity of teachers in the way they teach according to tracked notions of learning—of who learns and in what ways (Lee, 2012; Carbonaro, 2005; Rosenbaum, 1978); and tracking impacts the way students take up identities according to tracked ideals and norms (Luttrell & Parker, 2001; Kelly, 2008; Gilbert & Yerrick, 2001). It seems that students often move through the social world of school with identities prescribed by institutional dichotomies defined a century ago.

In my own classroom at Pruitt High School (a pseudonym), I teach American Literature with the goal of fostering civic discourse and critical inquiry, and with the hope that my students will begin to question themselves and their social worlds, and in turn gain an empowered perspective of their lives and selves. However, time and again, I feel that I slip into the ways I have been apprenticed to forms of schooling that Wolk (2007) calls a "broken and inhuman paradigm of schooling" and that misses that central purpose of helping students to construct identities in our modern world. Wolk goes on to argue:

We must stop schooling our children as if they were products and reclaim our schools as sacred places for human beings. We must rethink our classrooms as vibrant spaces that awaken consciousness to the world, open minds to the problems of our human condition, inspire wonder, and help people to lead personally fulfilling lives... As professional educators, it is our responsibility to challenge our curricula and to create schools that are personally and socially transformative. (p. 658)

Peering beyond dark institutional histories that limit the potential of transformation on both the individual and social levels, I look to this project as the chance to shed light on the ways that students navigate schooling without realizing the norms that impact their notions of self and social worlds. According to Beach, Johnston and Thein (2013), students remain unaware of the invisible influence of institutional *telos* just as fish remain unaware of the water currents that impacts their actions and trajectory. Acknowledging and questioning institutional norms, and becoming aware of the often-acknowledged dichotomies of achievement and failure enacts the crucial first step in sanctioning authentic identities from selves constructed both in and out of school and fostering more participatory social worlds in the classroom.

Background and Context

Pruitt High School is a large, suburban high school, twenty miles outside one the southeast's largest cities – the school district is the state's second largest, in a rapidly growing metropolitan area with diverse demographics: 39.8% White, 31.8% Black, 19.6% Latino/a, 5.1% Asian, 3.5% Multi-Racial, 47.4% of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch (District Student Data, 2015). However, Pruitt's demographics point to the polarized racial and economic divisions in the county, with the school's homogenous population characteristic of the district's more affluent schools: 81% White, 7% Black, 4% Latino/a, 8% of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The mean income for households in the school's primary zip code is \$107,138; the median income of \$91,856 falls \$15,282 short of the mean (Population Studies Center, 2010), suggesting a striated income gap even in the households within the attendance zone despite the large houses, multi-car garages, manicured lawns. Typical of the inequity in our education system's correlation of income to achievement, Pruitt is a successful school with high scores on both state achievement tests

(EOC) and aptitude tests (AP, SAT, ACT). The school's administration likes to tout all the statistics: 100% passing score on the state's standardized writing test (2013), high ranking on Newsweek's Best American High Schools, graduation rate, acceptance rate into colleges. And the school boasts of its typical position as third-ranking in the district on test scores, falling third only to schools with even higher degrees of affluence.

Academic success becomes the backdrop for the sanctioned ways that many students navigate the social worlds of the school. At orientations, open houses and communications with the community, school administration tends to tout the number of students enrolled in AP courses and in the school's new STEM and globalization academies; in turn, students tend to tout the number of AP classes taken as a badge of honor, and regard particularly rigorous AP classes such as AP US History and AP Physics as a rite of passage. But the accolades of achievement tend to recognize only one type of student, only one pathway to participation in the school. Leveled classrooms (AP, honors, on-level) become lines of demarcation by which students measure themselves and each other. In a community that values achievement above all else and confers status based on college entry, the stigma of falling short academically places a noticeable schism in the school, one that reinforces and exacerbates a sense of underachievement for students who cannot perform the identity of high-achieving AP student.

Loud and clear, the message of achievement and accomplishment transmits throughout the school; if a student does not fit the AP academic mold then he or she practically does not fit the school. GPAs, in many ways, act as a measure of worth. As the college admissions process becomes ever more competitive and as students compete for fewer spots by applying to more universities (Bruni, 2015; Hoover, 2013; Chace, 2013), students face more and more pressure to compete and to achieve, with GPA as the ultimate indicator. In November of each year, a school-

wide assembly recognizes the “Who’s Who” of Pruitt’s senior class – the top 5% of students as tallied by GPA, involvement and popularity. The sound that drones through the aisles of the gym is the pressure to fit the standard: 4.34, 4.18, 4.27, 4.11, 4.36. While there is no doubt that high-achieving students at Pruitt work assiduously for these quality-point-enhanced GPAs, there is a real problem and it comes from the messages that some students internalize from the culture of “excellence.” At Pruitt, high-achieving students face intense pressure to meet the standards, and low-achieving students (or even just students who messed up freshmen year) look at their GPA of 2.6 and think “game over.” Their response to school seems to relate to their resignation: they think there is no way to compete in the college admissions race, so why bother. If a student cannot get a 4.21 GPA, he or she might as well not even try. Their resistance to school seems to suggest that they feel no hope for the future as they only see the gulf that separates them from the lauded AP students. And so, roughly a third of the students in my college prep and co-taught American Lit classes do tune out; they often see no value and no reward in the curriculum, finding little recognition in the social strata of the school. Rather than a place that supports the authoring of multi-faceted identities and that allows for the negotiating of complex selves across social worlds, Pruitt is a place where the line of demarcation reduces paths to participation and ways of being to those that support and reinforce those reductive social worlds of academic excellence at the exclusion of other ways of being.

Purpose, Rationale, and Significance

Engström (1999) writes, “If anything, the current societal transformations should teach us that closed systems of thought do not work... Human activity is endlessly multifaceted, mobile and rich in variation of content and form” (p. 20). As I think of the ways that institutions position students into tracks, labels and identities, I consider the importance of understanding the

interrelation between spheres of activity, the ways that individual action is informed by social, institutional, cultural, and historical worlds. As a novice researcher, I seek to understand the complexity of socially-situated literacy practices. As a teacher committed to devising literacy events and activities that foster hopeful activity for all my students, I take Engeström's (1999) position as the need to observe a particular social context for what is essential about those contexts, and to better understand how agents navigate the interrelated aspects of their social worlds. I also take Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen's (2015) "pose, wobble, and flow" approach, one that permits contingent teaching practices imbued with "uncertainties and apprehension" necessary to the moves teachers must make in establishing spaces for critique and equity (p. 3). As a teacher researcher, the insights I gain from studying the social worlds at play in my classroom shed light on ways to foster a classroom culture that recognizes and transgresses the reductive patterns that limit complex activity. Smagorinsky, Augustine and Gallas (2006) draw on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) metaphor of the rhizome as the key metaphor for conceiving of social research as a means of interpreting social structures as complex ecologies with horizontal branching. These same twisting paths are the ones teacher-researchers follow as their thinking shifts toward the development of new concepts. I look to this research study as a means to interrogate the local and extended educational structures that impact activity in my classroom, to investigate my teaching for the ways it complies with patterns of passive pedagogies, and to explore the ways my classroom could become a social world that acknowledges and disrupt the detrimental dichotomies that limit the potential for that hopeful activity.

Statement of Problem and Research Questions

In these stratified classrooms we observe students taking up the roles informed by institutional and social structures; they often act out the parts handed to them. Holland,

Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) call figured worlds “a ‘standard plot’ against which narratives of unusual events are told” (p. 52). In schools, the plot we play again and again is one of stratification: upper or lower, we hand students parts that come with loaded associations about their intellect, their engagement, and even their very identity. The way our students accept, reject, or renegotiate these labels reflects in their engagement in literacy activity and in the degree of agency they exert in the classroom. For some of our most labeled students, the only degree of agency they may take is their utter rejection of school-sanctioned practices. This study sets out to examine the unwritten rules that govern engagement (or lack thereof), to better understand what social structures enact these rules and to consider how students and teachers interpret these unwritten rules for mediating their relationship within classes, with themselves as students and individuals, and with the dialogic search for truth or understanding:

- How do labels influence the [lack of] opportunities that teachers enact for dialogic inquiry, and how do labels influence students’ [un]willingness to engage in dialogic inquiry?
- How do students act on identities inferred from these labels? How do labels impact students’ attitudes towards school and the identities they exert in school?
- How can dialogic literacy practices help in destabilizing tracked labels and renegotiating identities for more participatory classrooms?

Ultimately this framework looks to dialogic practices and student-centered discussion with the hope of subverting and short-circuiting the tracked labels that inhibit engagement and empowerment. As our schools become more stratified along a divide of achievement and failure, the literacies practiced in our classrooms often conform to academic hierarchies that perpetuate “discourses of student deficit” (Vasudevan & Campano, 2009, p. 313). Our students lose the opportunity to engage in practices of literacy based on sociocultural ways of learning that could lead to transformative ways of understanding themselves and their worlds (Morrell, 2010).

Pedagogical Goals and Theoretical Grounding

For English teachers seeking to stimulate meaningful inquiry, a key challenge comes from the ways standards-based, test-centered pedagogies constrain the range of literacies practiced in our classrooms. We hope to provide rich opportunities to engage in dialogue and draw on literature as a lens for better understanding ourselves and our worlds, but we find our classrooms facing barriers enacted from narrowing pathways to participation. For our students, literacy, in many ways, has come to represent a set of isolated skills prescribed by standards and circumscribed by hierarchies (Sperling and DiPardo, 2008; Smagorinsky, Hansen, & Fink, 2013) – students identify the main idea and supporting evidence, they analyze diction, they interpret symbolism, they darken bubbles on a scantron, they earn (or fail to earn) a point on their GPA, they perform the identity of a successful college-bound student or the identity of a student resistant to these narrow pathways. With the hope of fostering opportunities for more authentic participation and engagement, this theoretical framework draws on three lines of sociocultural theory to better understand the identities, activities and interactions of individuals and groups in the social worlds of literacy education:

- Sociocultural approaches to literacy originate from Vygotsky's (1987) concept of internalization as a social act where learning begins with a social exchange that allows for the co-development of concepts (Smagorinsky, 2011). Literacy thus is a social act that cannot be reduced to decontextualized skills, as in standardized test prep (Street, 2007). Rather, speech and reading should be given social purposes beyond reading for reading's sake; words and text should be viewed as tools imbued with cultural and historical significances, open to interpretation rather than closed to supposed objectivity (Wertsch, 1998; Smagorinsky, 2011). Expanding literacy from a skill to a sociocultural practice situates the purpose of reading and writing to the application of these tools in goal- and purpose-oriented activity in a specific social context (Scribner & Cole, 1981). Collaborative construction as a community of practice, according to Wenger (2009), depends on people working in common pursuit to engage in

a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of

engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope through the mediation of tools and signs with cultural and historical meanings. (p. 1)

While it may prove too idealistic to foster this community of practice in a social world as heterogeneous as a classroom with students' *many* competing identities and purposes (Beach, Thein, and Parks, 2008), the concept still orients the classroom toward a developmental ethos, where teachers see the purpose of literacy in terms of students' lives inside and outside the classroom, and they develop literacy skills in terms of what students can do with those tools back in their own communities of practice and between communities of practice.

- Bakhtin's (1984) dialogism looks to the ways that community spaces allow dissonance or tension between multiple voices (as in Bakhtin's *heteroglossia*), destabilize notions of fixed meaning, and build students' interpretational authority, which in the long run allows students to question the conformist constructs that tracking may foist on them. One form of empowerment begets another (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007; Beach, Thein & Parks, 2008).
- Holland et al.'s (1998) figured world considers ways to redefine self-making in terms of "as if" possibilities. Students opened to the possibility of interpretational authority begin to reassert their agency and identity beyond the labels – "as if" possibilities permit students to figure new worlds in their schooling lives (Urrieta, 2007; Beach, Thein & Parks, 2008).

The power that starts with dialogue continues to shift students' perceptions of the classroom; their participation in the classroom fosters their sense of power in shifting other forms of hegemony. But classroom dialogue becomes much more than an involved discussion about a piece of literature or about a social issue, it becomes the potential for allowing students to reposition themselves in a space freed from (or lessened of) institutional hierarchies.

Research Approach

Design-based research orients the site of study toward intervention and observation, and it recognizes and sustains the complexity of socially-situated classrooms, buzzing with the real life and real problems of learning. According to McKenney and Reeves (2013), design-based research is "a genre of research in which the iterative development of solutions to practical and

complex educational problems also provides the context for empirical investigation, which yields theoretical understanding that can inform the work of others. Its goals and methods are rooted in, and not cleansed of, the complex variation of the real world” (p. 7). Through iterative cycles of design and qualitative study, the researcher observes the local context, looks to ontological paradigms for understanding learning in the local context, designs interventions to meet the needs of students in that context, and finally to construct new ontological paradigms based on new insights gained from the local context (Reinking & Bradley, 2008; DiSessa & Cobb, 2004; Cobb & Yackel, 1996).

This study combines design-based research for a methodological orientation (outlined in chapter three) with ethnographic tools (outlined in chapter four) to examine the potential of dialogic literacy practices to shift classroom culture to a more participatory and agentic community of learners. Because design-based research alternates between intervention and data collection, I engaged in “microcycles of design and analysis” as I collected data, observing students’ reactions to pedagogical shifts, considering the impact and continuing to engineer new pedagogical approaches (Gravemeijer and Cobb, 2006, p. 24). The ongoing and iterative practice of design, data collection and analysis oriented the study toward reflection even as the study unfolded; thus, in chapter five, I present both findings and discussion as the two coincided through the course of the instructional unit. In chapter six, I reflect on the research process and consider the implication of the study for teachers and teacher-researchers, considering the value of a *bricolage*. In Lévi-Strauss’s (1966) metaphor, the *bricoleur* operates as a sort of jack-of-all-trades on the bounds of society, one who adapts and repurposes, continuously tinkering with teaching practices to find space between the fixed educational structures for a more improvisatory and participatory community.

Important Definitions

Identity: Rather than the autonomous model of identity that theorizes the self as a fixed and stable inner truth (as in Romantic and Transcendental literature of the 1840s), a sociocultural view of identity looks at identity as constructed, performed, and negotiated across particular social contexts and informed by cultural and historical discourses (Beach, Johnston, and Thein, 2015). In Holland et al.'s (1998) theory of identity, "the development of identity and agency [is] specific to practices and activities situated in historically contingent, socially enacted, culturally constructed 'worlds'" (p. 7). Identity as contingent, emergent and multi-faceted means that students may move between contexts, continuously improvising the self they express within the norms and practices of that social space. In social spaces that limit agentive identity construction – prescribing certain ways of being, sanctioning certain identities and excluding others – the potential to refigure these limitations comes also from the social context, from collective action to imagine "as if" alternatives and identities in counter to restrictive norms (Holland et al., 1998).

Positioning and Negotiations of Positionality: In considering unfolding patterns of social interaction as both improvisatory and fixed, Harré and Langenhove (1991) draw on ideas of positioning from consumer marketing and from military strategy to look at the ways that people position themselves in certain social worlds and the ways that people are positioned by people, social groups, institutional norms, or societal discourses. They define positioning as "the assignment of fluid 'parts' or 'roles' to speakers in the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts" (p. 218). Harré and Langenhove (1991) also point out that most human activity is indeterminate, in that

positioning undergoes frequent negotiation and repositioning. Through social exchanges, a person positioning and a person positioned may shift position, becoming more aware of the often-tacit discourses that underlie social patterns and positioning. However, Holland and Lave (2001) also note that even though marginalized groups may not have the power to reposition dominant discourses, their own positionality in the margins stabilizes as a form of counter-positioning:

In the course of local struggles, marginalized groups create their own practices. Participants in both [strong and weak groups, in terms of social dominance] are identified by these practices and often identify themselves as “owners” of them. These practices thus provide the means by which subjectivities in the margins of power thicken and become more developed and so more determinant in shaping local struggles. (p. 19)

The potential to renegotiate positionality is in allowing marginal cultures to assert their own positionality outside but in parallel with dominant discourses. Beach, Thein and Park (2008) note that the power to reshape a circle of social activity that marginalizes subordinate social groups as outsiders in a circle of social activity comes when marginalized groups coalesce, thickening their own positionality, and begin to assert the importance of their own identities and social worlds. The circle then reforms in a competing social world, with participants negotiating their positionality and in turn reshaping the positioning of the entire social space.

Social Worlds: In interactional social spaces, people act as agentic participants in constructing social patterns, but people also remain passively positioned by historical discourses, cultural models, social norms, and by the jockeying for position by social groups within the space. Drawing on Holland et al.’s (1998) figured worlds, Beach, Thein and Johnston (2008) posit that “these social worlds are not entities ‘out there’; rather they are constructed through adolescents’ performances in these worlds based on familiar, prototypical traditions, roles and practices

associated with particular worlds” (p. 36). The potential of these social worlds is to put into tension prototypical social performances informed by discourses of race, class and gender with improvisational social exchanges that challenge the hegemonic assumptions of these discourses. These spaces also allow for reconstructing the patterns of participation within the space in that “when certain groups assume center stage, people in the margins resist by taking up alternative practices and create their own center, transforming what was the center into the margins” (p. 39).

Literacy Practices: At the most basic level, literacy practices are what people do with reading, writing and speech to navigate social environments. Contextual and socially-oriented, literacy practices situate literacy in the roles and rules of the immediate social environment as well as the extended cultural one. According to Barton and Hamilton (2000), “the notion of literacy practices offers a powerful way of conceptualizing the link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape” (p. 7). Shaped by and shaping the social environment including hierarchical discourses, literacy conceptualized as a practice holds purpose beyond developing the skills of reading and writing; it is what people do with literacy to achieve goals within specific contexts. Street (1994) sees these goals as transformative, “a way of effecting personal as well as social change: of re-positioning oneself, constituting new identities” (p. 16). Orienting classrooms toward a pedagogy centered on the literacy practices of the setting means that teachers should attempt to attune reading to students’ lives and selves, to position the purpose for writing to impacts beyond the classroom.

Literacy Events: If literacy practices are the social current that necessitates particular forms of reading and writing to meet the needs of the social setting, literacy events are the observable

application of texts and techniques to achieve social goals. Heath (1982) defines literacy events as “occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies” (p. 50). In formal settings as in work and school, literacy events may be more routinized and regimented; in informal settings as in peer groups or home, literacy events may be more informal or improvisatory, but what remains central to both is the mediation of text in the meaning-making process. Readers draw on texts to achieve personal and social purposes, so Barton and Hamilton (2000) point out that literacy events are individual and contextual, meaning that what counts as a literacy event for one person remains purposeless for another person. What this contextual view of literacy events means for teachers is the imperative to expand literacy in heterogeneous ways, to not simply privilege academic literacies over all others, but to combine academic literacies with other ways of reading, writing, and knowing that hold purpose beyond the classroom context.

Dialogism: Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) philosophy and literary theory, dialogic instructional practices seek to apply the principles of his philosophies: that meaning emerges in dialogue, in the ways that one speaker anticipates the utterances of another, and in turn responds, reciprocates, or even ignores other voices. Building from Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia* or “many voicedness,” Nystrand (1997) argues that dialogic instruction is more than anything a restructuring of the social organization of a classroom culture – a move from a stable monologic authority to an emergent dialogic reciprocity:

the language and discourse of any given time and place are continuously shaped and pulled in different directions by interacting forces of stability and change. On the one hand are the “centripetal” forces of stability and canonization – rules of grammar, usage,

“official genres,” “correct” language, privileged ideologies; on the other hand are the ‘centrifugal’ forces of life, experience and the natural pluralism of language. (p. 12)

In dialogic spaces, authoring is a shared practice destabilizing the fixed authority of teachers and texts, wherein the community brings into contact various perspectives on a text or concept (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007). Tensions between participants may emerge from discordant perspectives, but these very tensions brought into dialogue can counter the tacit hegemonies that often go unquestioned and unacknowledged (Beach, Thein and Parks, 2008).

Tracking and Ability-Grouping: Deeply entrenched in our education system is the sorting and ranking of students into what we call differentiated groups, but the mechanisms of tracking date from the early 1900s with the upsurge of immigrant groups populating schools and challenging Anglo Saxon hegemonies. Cloaked in euphemistic terms of preparing diverse students to meet the needs of the developing industrial society, tracking became a tool of social engineering with white, middle class students placed into college preparation tracks, and immigrant and African American students from the south placed into vocational tracks (Oakes, 2005; Worthy, 2010; Yonezawa, Wells & Serna, 2002). Far from meeting the needs of students in different tracks, the disparate levels privilege critical thinking and academic rigor to those deemed high-achieving and consign rote learning and skills training to those deemed low-achieving (Oakes, 2005). The detracking movement of the 1990s attempted to dismantle the mechanisms of tracking, but levels and ranks remained remarkably sturdy. Ability-grouping, with its ostensibly more permeable levels, still relegates students to fixed academic groups and identities, with most students remaining in either the top or bottom level rather than moving between levels (Yonezawa, Wells & Serna, 2002). Not only do these institutional hierarchies impact students’ academic prospects,

but they also impede identity construction; students begin to take up institutional positioning through their attitudes toward school and the identities they exert in school (Carbonaro, 2005).

Design-Based Research: Originating from Brown's (1992) dissatisfaction with laboratory research that reduces the lived complexity of actual classroom interventions to the sterile control of pre/post testing, design-based research takes an engineering approach, combining theoretical understandings with practical innovation through an iterative design and implementation process. Thus the development of an intervention starts with a theoretical analysis of a learning problem in a local context, then implements cycles of intervention in the effort to develop both pedagogy and ontology in remediation of that problem (Reinking and Bradley, 2008; Design Based Research Collective, 2003). Transformation-oriented, this approach to research seeks to empower participation in the research process, with students and teachers collaborating with researchers and growing through the process. Brown (1992) notes that the Hawthorne effect, a limitation in quantitative research when the research setting changes in the course of research, becomes the real promise of design-based research. Students and teachers in the iterative design process participate in the co-construction of the intervention and in the improvement of the classroom environment. This orientation toward change extends beyond the local context through the development of learning theory based on the local setting (Barab and Squire, 2004).

Ethnographic Observation Tools: To match the orientation of design-based research to closely observe the complexity of the local learning context, researchers can draw on the ethos and methods of ethnography. For Gutiérrez and Vossoughi (2011), the pairing of designed

interventions and ethnographic observation work in concert to expose the complexities of learning by making the familiar strange:

This “strangifying” role is particularly important to making visible the routinized practices of work and educational spaces, bringing to the surface potential contradictions between these practices and the objects or desired outcomes of activity. (p. 104)

Close study of a classroom culture starts with participant observation, descriptive field notes, and interviews from a purposeful sampling group, and writing samples. These observational tools aid the fine-grained understanding of a social space necessary for ethnography, and they help researchers see the relationships between actors in the scene, the tools and texts mediating learning in the scene, and the sociohistorical discourses that underlie activity (Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamäki, 1999).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to design a classroom space where students come to explore identity in terms of the social, cultural and institutional worlds that shape identity construction and performance. To lessen the impact of institutional discourses that prescribe certain ways of being, this study takes up a dialogic approach to literacy practices that orients the classroom as a shared space for authorship that extends the purpose of reading and writing beyond the classroom walls to the ways people use literacy in particular social contexts (Fecho, 2011; Barton & Hamilton, 2000). This review of literature starts with an examination of sociocultural theory drawing from Vygotsky's (1978) developmental theories, Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain's (1988) figured worlds, and Bakhtin's dialogism (1984). Collectively these theories afford this study a lens for understanding the socially-constructed world of school and the tools to expose the tacit norms and trajectories that govern the social world of school. To understand the historical and institutional structures of schooling, I reviewed studies that trace the impact of these structures on the social worlds of students and teachers. Lastly, the review examines teacher-centered classroom practices, often dictated by tracking and other institutional norms, in contrast with student-centered practices, implemented to minimize the effects of limiting institutional norms.

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural Foundations and Approaches to Literacy

Sociocultural approaches to literacy draw from Vygotsky's (1978) views of human development as neither strictly cognitive nor behavioral, but in development that comes from an individual's interactions with the social and cultural world:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, *between* people (*interpsychological*) and then

inside the child (*intrapsychological*). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (p. 57, emphasis in original)

In Vygotsky's conception of internalization, the central move is from social to individual with children gaining knowledge and "higher psychological processes" through interaction with the immediate social context and the extended cultural one. However, internalization seems to hinge on "actual relationships" – the type of authenticity that conceptualizes literacy practices based on students' *actual* interests in the classroom and out, to enter into *actual* dialogues with peers about matters of authentic importance, to bring into the classroom *actual* identities.

To enable *actual* goals and purposes from outside the classroom that require literacies and skills practiced in the classroom, educators might look to Wertsch (1998) who adapts Burke's (1969) Pentad (act, scene, agent, agency, purpose) as an analytical tool to interpret the "action" of an "agent" within a sociocultural context or "scene" – for Wertsch, the scene does not refer simply to the personal and social context; rather, the "circumference" of a "scene" widens to account for the ways that institutions, cultures and histories influence and impede the agent's actions (Wertsch, 1991, p. 15). The interaction between agent and widened sociocultural scene offers the potential for multiple pathways for participation as "individual(s)-acting-with-mediational means" become aware of tacit sociocultural norms, exerting agency and taking action with or against those norms. Irmischer (1972), in his introduction of Burke's Pentad, poses the questions: "Are there ways of helping thoughts grow? Are there devices that will help us generate thoughts without limiting the capacity of the mind to range freely?" (as cited in Burke, 1978, p. 331). This expansive way of conceptualizing learning and development encourages thinking and learning "to range freely" beyond the confines of narrowed pedagogies, and widens

the circumference for what counts as literacy, in contrast with those practices that narrow this potential.

The Essential Role of Speech in Development and Learning

For Vygotsky (1978), “*the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously independent lines of development converge*” (p. 24, emphasis in original). If internalization starts with social activity and moves inward as the mental processes realign with knowledge drawn from socially-situated sign systems, the medium for internalization is speech. To illustrate the move from *intramental* to *intermental* activity, Vygotsky presents the metaphor of a young child grasping for an item, the child without the capacity to understand what it means for something to be out of reach. The moment of internalization comes with social interaction; the child’s mother interprets grasping as pointing and comes to the child’s aid. The physical action transmutes to a sign as mediated in the social context: the child simultaneously makes meaning and becomes aware of the meaning-making process. What this metaphor suggests for the sociocultural classroom is that grasping for ideas precedes forming ideas, and speech in the social context is the vehicle for grasping.

This idea of grasping speech parallels Smagorinsky’s (2001) interpretation of Vygotsky’s terms *smysl* as internal sense (originally translated as inner speech) and *znachenie* as external articulation. Meaning emerges through the process of articulation, with “exploratory efforts” that allow meanings to emerge and become more fully formed. Smagorinsky (2001) borrows Vygotsky’s metaphor: “*Smysl* is as yet unarticulated, being instead the storm cloud of thought that produces the shower of words” (p. 145). *Smysl* – comprised of inchoate meanings, fragmentary thoughts, impressions, associations and emotions – is the necessary beginning to

articulate thought. After all, no shower falls without a storm cloud developing; no fully formed thought develops without students grasping for meaning. The importance of exploratory work in students working socially from *smsyl* to *znachenie* is that a permissive and inclusive classroom allows for readers to try out contingent meanings until landing on a firm articulation.

In their concept of perspective-taking as a necessary stance for reading multicultural literature, Thein, Beach and Parks (2007) likewise advocate students engaging in exploratory talk to reach for ideas out of their immediate grasp. Classroom discussions center on “an exploratory, ‘I’m not sure about this’ stance as opposed to a definitive, ‘this is the answer’ stance” and a distancing phrase, “Some people might say” (p. 58). Each of these stances take the pressure off students and creates a space where students can venture an exploratory thought – helping students to see that discussion is the construction of meaning (not just the expression of it) helps them engage in what they are thinking without fear of being right or wrong, or of being inadvertently incendiary or offensive. For Smagorinsky (2011), this type of exploratory speech permits articulations to evolve as readers explore complex and contingent interpretations, often those that elude easy expression. The young children in Vygotsky’s experiments, when faced with a nearly insurmountable problem engage in speech that reaches beyond immediate tools and understandings to new possibilities for problem-solving.

Despite the importance of exploratory speech in grasping for understanding, many classrooms continue to be sites that silence students’ voices through the authoritarian control of teacher-centered literacy practices. Smagorinsky (2011) points out that most classrooms expect “*final draft* [rather than] *exploratory* speech,” which limits their ability to grasp for authentic ideas:

Rather than talking their way into ideas, students are expected to have fully-formed ideas ready to enter into classroom exchanges. Teachers, however, are the only ones likely to

have fully-formed ideas on topics that are well-schooled and well-rehearsed in their own conceptions, yet new, challenging, and formidable to students. Teachers thus end up carrying the interpretive load while students provide bits of information when the teacher solicits it. (p. 85-86)

The crucial role of exploratory speech in affording expansive and authentic learning remains continuously undermined by teacher-centered questioning and discussion. Mehan's (1979) frequently cited study of the IRE pattern of "initiation [by teacher], reply [by student], evaluation [by teacher]" also points out that teachers most frequently ask simple questions for which students already know the answers (and teachers *know* that students already *know* the answers) (p. 287). Basic questioning fails to stimulate the complex thinking that results from exploratory speech.

Interactions Mediated in Social, Institutional, Historical, and Cultural Contexts

In Wertsch's (1998) view of mediated action, the balance between human agency and social context cannot be interpreted in isolation; the concept of "individual(s)-acting-with-mediational-means" emphasizes the balance of interaction between agents and scene. Wertsch looks to Resnick (1994) who argues,

Don't underestimate the role of the environment in influencing and constraining behavior. People often seem to think of the environment as something to be *acted upon*, not something to be *interacted with*. People tend to focus on the behaviors of individual objects, ignoring the environment that surrounds [and interacts with] the objects. (as cited in Wertsch, 1998, p. 21)

Wertsch (2011) posits this interaction between agent and cultural mediational tool as an "irreducible tension" and he presents the metaphor of a pole vaulter as agent and his appropriation of the pole as the mediator, culturally situated and adaptive to technological innovations. The metaphor begins with the "irreducible" interaction – the action of pole-vaulting is meaningless without the interaction of agent and mediational tool. The agent relies on

mediating means (cultural artifacts, tools, and sign systems) to take action in social worlds in the same way that the pole vaulter relies on the pole:

The pole by itself does not magically propel vaulters over a crossbar; it must be used skillfully by the agent. At the same time, an agent without a pole or with an inappropriate pole is incapable of participating in the event. (Wertsch, 1998, p. 27)

What the metaphor elucidates is the purposeful appropriation between agent and tool. The agent only realizes his potential with the culturally-mediated tool; likewise the tool remains meaningless without the appropriation of the agent.

In socially-situated literacy practices, appropriation of language as the primary mediational means grounds the purpose of literacy education in application and reinterpretation within specific social contexts. Scribner and Cole (1981) define literacy practices as “recurrent, goal-directed sequence[s] of activities” that go beyond skills to the purposes for practicing these literate activities within specific social contexts: “Literacy is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes and specific contexts of use” (p. 236). Their study of literacy practices among the Vai people distinguishes between the skills and tasks and the wider sociocultural purposes for reading and writing. Literacy practices within these social contexts orients toward communication as a shared practice based not necessarily on schooled forms of cognition but on communal cultural practices.

Wertsch (1998), rather than positing a deterministic view that positions agents as “mindless, helpless consumers of the mediational means” (p. 55), draws on Bakhtin’s concept of *prisvoniye* as the “process of making something one’s own” (as cited in Wertsch, 1998, p. 53). As in the pole-vaulting metaphor, language (the pole) only reaches significance in the actions of the agent (the pole vaulter). What stands as the fulcrum of the interaction between agent and

mediating artifact is the way the agent makes use of and makes meaning from language.

According to Bakhtin (1981),

The word language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own... Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. (as cited in Wertsch, 1998, p. 54)

What limits appropriation or making language one's own is that utterances exist not only in other people's mouths but in institutional and cultural norms that privilege one form of social language over another (Wertsch, 1991; Smagorinsky, 2011b). Bakhtin's concept of *prisivonie* celebrates the agent's individual intentions, accents, and expressions, but the practices of many literacy classrooms disallow the type of appropriation that permits students to take ownership of their own expression.

Not only do the authoritarian social contexts privilege academic forms of literacy and limit expansive speech (Wertsch, 1991), but so do authoritarian institutional contexts that rank students by tracks and preserve status quo hierarchies and so-called meritocracies. According to Smagorinsky (2011), "students learn early in life to act within an authoritarian system" that regulates their movements, activities and even their senses of self (p. 83). In overt and covert ways, the institution of education communicates limitations rather than possibilities, exclusion rather than inclusion, privilege rather than access. Looking at explicit educational hierarchies, Applebee et al. (2003), in a large-scale quantitative study observing time-spent in student-centered discussion, identify the ways that low-track classes shortchange students in meaningful

literacy practices: unequal teaching quality with highly reputed teachers moving into higher tracks, more text complexity in the higher track, less academic work in the lower track, and less time for meaningful discussion practices (3.7 minutes as opposed to 14.5 minutes per hour). The implicit message from the explicit structure is that teachers in higher track classes have higher expectations, and offer more opportunities for complex literacy practices and expansive forms of social interaction.

Identity Mediated through Social Worlds and Renegotiated through Figured Worlds

Through the social worlds around us, we come to understand ourselves and our world. According to Beach, Thein, and Parks (2008), the social world of education is populated with competing social ideologies, loaded with social hierarchies that rank and sort students, and prescribed with underlying discourses of race, class, and gender. Against these social worlds, students mediate identities, performing selves in acceptance or resistance of these discourses. Wortham's (2004) year-long case study of Tyisha, a ninth-grade student, tracks her shifting identity from an institutional label that defined her as a good girl to one as a trouble maker. The student's sense of self coalesced around "the use of social resources to construct self-understanding" (p. 165). Wortham notes that both social and individual factors play a role in a person's sense of self; an individual strives to define herself within her own view of her identity but also within the reflection of society. Tyisha began to change as her peers and teachers recognized and reinforced one identity (the troublemaker) over the other (the good girl). This precipitous transition points to Holland and Lave's (2001) notion of positioning and thickening as the relationship between self- and social-identification:

- positioning as an event of identification, in which a recognizable category of identity gets explicitly or implicitly applied to an individual in an event that takes place across seconds, minutes, or hours.

- thickening as the increasing presupposability of an individual's identity over ontogenetic time, as the individual and others come increasingly to think of and position him or her as a recognizable kind of person (as cited in Wortham, 2004, p. 166)

In this example, one moment in particular positioned the girl with a new identity (the teacher reprimanded her for being a “bad student” after she told a joke) and then that identity thickened through other students recognizing her as a bad student. In the same way, the labels associated with social hierarchies (lazy, slacker, stoner, geek, know-it-all) position students within those identities only to be thickened through the repeated application of the label, by teachers or by peers or even by one's own self.

The concept of figured worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) yields possibilities for identity despite the restrictions inherent in an authoritarian social construct; the notion of “self-making” allows people to come to understand themselves, to “figure who they are, through the worlds they participate in” (Urrieta, 2007, p. 110, 107). Figured worlds looks at patterns of self-image determined through boundless imaginative reconstructions (such as the imaginative worlds of romance novels and fantasy role-play, or even the figured world of Alcoholic Anonymous where a plastic token represent sobriety). According to Holland et al. (1998),

figured world rest upon people's ability to form and be formed in collectively realized “as if” realms...People have the propensity to be drawn to, recruited for, and formed in these worlds, and to become active in and passionate about them. People's identities and agency are formed dialectically and dialogically in these “as if” worlds. (p. 49)

In the possibility for reconstructing these “as if” alternatives, we can explore a new sense of agency and identity. The shy woman explores a torpid love affair in romance novels, the timid boy fights the dragon in role-play, the near-destitute alcoholic finds solace and validation from what a plastic token represents, or the student always labeled as low-track recreates her notions

of herself as curious, engaged, empowered. Urrieta (2007) notes that the worlds we figure and the roles we assume are mediated by cultural norms that act as a “backdrop for interpretation and [that] provides cultural resources that are durable and socially reproduced” (p. 109). The worlds we figure start with cultural norms and then subvert them to suit the subverter’s “as if” notions of culture. So the worlds we figure in tracked classrooms initiate a set of identities and interactions that informs the actions/reactions of students even before they walk in the door – they first fulfill the role that is ordained by the backdrop of previous experiences and social constructions, but then they (could) subvert it. Urrieta (2007) refers to this subversion as “negotiations of positionality”: when individuals are labeled or tracked, they are denied the process of “self-making” and must negotiate their positionality. They may accept, reject or negotiate the label (p. 111). In classrooms and with overly deterministic labels, educators might wonder how many students take a stance of apathetic nonparticipation in rejection of the classroom’s figured world? How many students would shift their participation in the classroom if given a chance to renegotiate restrictive positioning?

Harré and Langenhove’s (1991) positioning theory draws on the indeterminacy of social patterns for ways that a person may resist or renegotiate the way he or she may be positioned by other people, by social groups, or by institutional norms or societal discourses. Though positioning may limit a person’s sense of agency, Harré and Langenhove (1991) posit five modes of positioning that also accounts for ways that these positions can be repositioned:

- First and second order positioning: Hierarchical in nature, the first order position, according to Harré and Langenhove, comes from a person who “thinks he has the moral right” to assert an authoritative position over the person in the second order (p. 220). However, this position and the underlying ‘moral’ come into question when the person in the second order calls into question the tacit hierarchy and therefore assert that the position must be renegotiated. The person in the first order, though, is also positioned – by the discourses that sanction his or her “moral right.”

- Performative and accountive positioning: Like first and second order positioning, the way a person is positioned comes into question but in a retrospective form. In a later conversation, perhaps with another party, the person positioned (either in first or second position) renegotiates the positioning. This could be the person in the first order position reifying the positioning or it could be the person in the second order challenging the positioning.
- Self and other positioning: Recursive in nature, self and other positioning suggests that both members in any positioning are positioned: “within a conversation, each of the participants always positions the other while simultaneously positioning him or herself” (p. 222). The act of positioning in a social exchange hinges on the discourses that underlie that exchange, each person positioned by either initiating or taking up the positioning. Self and other positioning can still be improvised with either member renegotiating the positioning.
- Tacit and intentional positioning: Most positioning is tact, referring to the discourses that often go unacknowledged in social exchanges.

Harré and Langenhove (1991) emphasize the dynamic nature of positioning, that each member of a discursive interaction reflexively takes up, adapts, renegotiates or rejects the positioning.

For “malignant positioning,” defined as positions that impede a person’s sense of being or agency, the ability to renegotiate their positioning can be limited by the perceptions of them as malignant by “healthy others” (Sabat, 2003, p. 86). In an examination of the ways that people with Alzheimer’s Disease (AD) face malignant positioning, Sabat (2003) calls this positioning “dangerous, insofar as they can have negative effects not only upon the ways in which the person is seen by others, but upon the ways in which the person with AD is treated and may come to see himself to one or another degree” (p. 86). This malignant positioning likens to Holland and Lave’s (2001) concept of thickening wherein repeated application of a position limits a person’s ability to renegotiate that positionality. In thinking of tracking as a position and a positioning, it shares many of the modes that Harré and Langenhove (1991) define – in the ways that it acts as a

tacit and intentional positioning, both in the intentional structure of tracking and the tacit self and others application of those tracks to social interactions.

Holland et al (1998) note that figured worlds rank and “distribute” participants as those included and those excluded into a particular figured world. To subvert this distribution, Holland et al. (1998) call on Inden’s (1990) definition of human agency:

the realized capacity of people to act upon their world and not only to know about or give personal or intersubjective significance to it. That capacity is the power of people to act purposefully and reflectively, in more or less complex interrelationships with one another, to reiterate and remake the world in which they live, in circumstances where they may consider different courses of action possible and desirable, though not necessarily from the same point of view. (qtd. in Holland et al, 1998, p. 42)

It is in this capacity to act upon our world that we can refigure the worlds already figured for us, that we can reject the labels and renegotiate the self – all the while we subvert the narrowed literacy practices and restrictive educational institutions.

Dialogic Renegotiation in Social Worlds

In his book *Rabelais and his World*, literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) suggests that the power of carnival is one of uninhibited festivity that ignores all normal societal customs – rank, hierarchy, norms, customs. And in this brief moment of permissiveness, the high and the low dance side by side, oblivious to the normal regulations that divide them. The power of carnival as a moment of reprieve is in the chance to flatten or disturb hierarchies:

one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privilege, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 10)

Bakhtin framed his dialogic theory as the power of language to seek the truth in social contexts that demand our response. In dialogue, we shift thinking, we question norms, we seek the truth. Bakhtin (1984) said, “Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual

person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction (p.110). In these moments of carnival when the loaded associations of labels and tracks ease, we have a moment to engage in dialogue that undermines the hierarchies and labels. For teachers who seek the dialogic escape from limits and excuses and labels, there is a method to the madness. Fecho and Botzakis (2007) identify the following characteristics of the dialogic process as envisioned by Bakhtin:

- Raise questions and author response among group
- Embrace context and nonneutrality of language
- Encourage multiple perspectives
- Flatten or disturb hierarchies
- Learning is under construction and evolving rather than static (p. 550)

Pace (2006) links dialogism to the transformations inherent in critical literacy: “[Bakhtin] suggested that independent, discriminate thinking... is characterized by a ‘separation between internally-persuasive discourse and authoritarian-enforced discourse’” (qtd. in Pace, 2006, p. 585). Pace goes on to explain that engaging in dialogism offers the potential to foster this independent thought:

the individual’s encounter with multiple perspectives in dialogue fuels independent, critical thinking, in part because these opportunities for hearing or reading different perspectives increases the possibilities we have for understanding human experience. (p. 585)

It is in the sharing of these experiences that students can see beyond the authoritarian-enforced discourse and see how this discourse has become internalized and perpetuated in our lives. The power of the carnivalesque dialogue comes in the easing of norms and the “realization that language and meaning are always in play and that each of us has something to contribute to that intellectual struggle” (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007, p. 551). The power of the dialogic is the potential

to shift our perceptions about narrowed literacy practices and engage in truth-seeking conversation.

The potential of grounding classrooms on literacy as a sociocultural practice comes with expanding beyond the tacit and limiting structures of our educational system today. Through dialogic practices that confront tensions; through exploratory speech that allow for searching; through collective inquiry with peers; through self-making that allows for authentic identity work comes the potential to transgress these limitations. Bruner (1986) argues,

A culture is constantly in process of being recreated as it is interpreted and negotiated by its members. Education is (or should be) one of the principle forums for performing this function—though it is often timid in doing so. It is the forum aspect of a culture that gives its participants a role in constantly making and remaking the culture. (p. 123)

Without timidity, we must continue to expand the hope for transformative literacy practices that empower our students with making and remaking our social worlds.

Acknowledging the Figured Worlds of Institutional Tracking and Labeling

Awareness of learning as a socially-situated space in which “people adopt certain stances, attitudes and identities consistent with the unique demands of the world” means that teachers must consider students’ responses based on the social worlds they navigate, worlds influenced by community values, peer interactions and institutional norms (Beach, 1998, p. 177). In our highly-structured schools, the institutional norms of labeling and tracking exert great influence on the stances, attitudes and identities our students take up in response to the ways schools position them as high-achieving or low-achieving. According to Luttrell and Parker (2001), “school tracking systems are not abstract divisions made between students with identified skill levels. Rather these systems of distinction operate as figured worlds and are ‘peopled by the figures, characters, and types who carry out its tasks’ – including teachers who (unwittingly perhaps)

interact with students they view as being or not being college-bound or as working with their hands rather than their minds” (p. 241).

As teachers attempting to foster classroom spaces where students can construct meaning and identities that transgress these institutional norms, we must consider how the systems of tracking become a figured world, drawn on Holland et al.’s (1998) theory that “individuals and groups are always (re)forming themselves as persons and collectives through cultural materials created in the immediate and more distant past” (p. 18). While the structures of tracking, securely anchored in the past, prove durable, we might find more hope in forming and reforming new possibilities for more expansive forms of identity and meaning, moving our students from passive observers to active constructors. Holland et al. (1998) define positional identity as

a person’s apprehension of her social position in a lived world: that is, depending on the persons present, of her greater or lesser access to spaces, activities, genres, and through those genres, authoritative voices, or any voices at all. (p. 128)

Social worlds position individuals into patterns of activities and ways of being through the norms, artifacts and discourses of that environment. Individuals may perpetuate that positioning by acting out expected behaviors; they may withdraw from that positioning; or they may renegotiate that positioning in ways that challenge tacit discourses. In a case study of African American girls in a magnet high school, Fordham (1993) observed the social positioning of Black girls as highly visible and vocal in social interactions (in demanding recognition historically denied Black women), and as disruptive and disengaged in academic activity. Positional identities in the school gave the girls only one choice – to fulfill the expectations that others have of “those loud black girls” (p. 3), so for girls resisting this social positioning, their resistance came in silence, in avoidance of the positional identity. Fordham describes academically successful black girls in the school as nearly invisible and completely

unacknowledged in their refusal (either explicit or implicit) take up these positions. What Fordham's dichotomy of noise and silence suggests is the oversimplification inherent in positional identity, the either/or polarity of fulfilling the norms of the social position, or the absolute exclusion of those norms. As teachers, we must consider the ways that our classrooms can become sites of possibility where students can renegotiate beyond the polarity of acceptance or rejection, and to find ways to renegotiate ways of being in the classroom, admitting competencies and literacies excluded from the tacit positioning of what it means to be a so-called successful student. Opening possibilities for more types of successful students and more ways of becoming a successful student challenges the underlying discourses of tracking.

The Historical Structure of Tracking and its Impact on Identities

For our students navigating identity in the highly institutionalized world of schooling, the historical vestiges of tracking still inform their experiences of learning. Since the first grade, our students have been classified, sorted and categorized, and these labels carry written and unwritten significance for how our students view the classroom and themselves. Gee (2000-2001) argues that "When an identity is underwritten and sustained by an institution, that institution works, across time and space, to see to it that certain sorts of discourse, dialogue, and interactions happen often enough and in similar enough ways to sustain the [institutional identities] it underwrites" (p. 105). If there is any hope of building a classroom culture that allows students to engage in discursive explorations of identity that resist these socially-situated worlds, teachers must first acknowledge the lingering legacy of tracking. In her foundational treatise on tracking, Oakes (1985) defines the mechanisms of tracking as differentiating between the identities of students in high and low tracks:

a student in a high-achieving group is seen as a high-achieving person, bright, smart, quick, and in the eyes of many, good. And those in the low achieving groups come to be

called slow, below average, and—often when people are being less careful—dummies, sweatshops, or yahoos. (p. 3)

We cringe at these labels deeply embedded in the hierarchies of the past. But how far have our schools truly progressed since Oakes first called for the end of tracking? Not far enough, not fast enough. Oakes (2005) argues in the second edition that

the deep structure of tracking remains uncannily robust. Most middle and high schools still sort students into classes at different levels based on judgments of students' "ability." This sorting continues to disadvantage those in lower-track classes. Such students have less access to high-status knowledge, fewer opportunities to engage in stimulating learning activities, and classroom relationships less likely to foster engagement with teachers, peers and learning. (p. xi)

Tracking, though we may call it ability grouping or leveling now, continues to define what we expect from our students and what education opportunities we will present them.

The social structures of our schools build from the foundational structures of our society. Tracking follows the same exclusionary hierarchies seen in politics and economics: a hackneyed but honest story of the haves and have-nots. Understanding how these hierarchies impact engagement in our classrooms today means that we need to look at the beginning of tracking and the work to mitigate its destructive consequences.

The origin of tracking as a tool of social engineering. Worthy (2010) traces the roots of tracking to the upsurge of immigration in the early 1900s that brought huddled masses "of poor, uneducated, and unskilled immigrants from eastern and southern Europe and job-seeking rural youth, later joined by persons of color as southern African-Americans sought employment in the north and Puerto Ricans migrated to their new country of citizenship" to what had previously been mostly white, Anglo-Saxon schools (p. 273).

According to Oakes (2005), "between 1880 and 1918 student enrollment across the nation increased by over 700 percent" (p. 15). From this population explosion and culture clash

came the beginning of tracking and the introduction of college preparation and vocational tracks, with most immigrants and minorities assigned to the vocational track and most white, Anglo Saxons assigned to the honors track. Worthy (2010) notes,

Some educators at the time advanced the rationale that the new schools would be the most efficient way to prepare citizens for the industrialized economy, while others asserted that tracking was a form of equal education opportunity designed to meet students' needs, abilities, and interests, which were openly seen as being based on race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background. (p. 273)

The ideals of tracking sought to balance the needs of diverse learners within the progressive goals of Common and Comprehensive Schools to spread literacy and prosperity. However, the tracking of American education quickly became a tool of social engineering – to dichotomously track students as workers or leaders. Lucas (1999) locates the origin of tracking and social engineering in the argument of education sociologist Ross Finney (1928):

It is not enough that we teach children to think, we must actually forcefeed them with the concentrated results of expert thinking... Ours are the schools of a democracy, which all children attend. At least half of them never had an original idea of any general nature, and never will. But they must behave as if they had sound ideas... What the duller half of the population needs, therefore, is to have their reflexes conditioned into behavior that is socially suitable.... The reader is reminded that superior intellects are not the subject of this chapter. Teach them to think, by all means. But for the duller half of the school population, teaching them to think is a wellnigh hopeless enterprise. (qtd. in Lucas, 1999, p. 4)

The paradox of American tracking is evident in this notion that America provides democratic education for all children; but that we expect only “original ideas” from a few and that we must “condition” the rest for their proper social roles, the proper roles to which we acculturate them in low-track classrooms dominated by menial thinking. How much of this paradigm still remains in the kill-and-drill lessons that “forcefeed” basic skills in our on-level classes?

Leveling and ability grouping as de facto tracking. Lucas (1999) traces the growing derision with tracking programs starting in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in urban centers of

New York and Chicago, and points to the Civil Rights Movement and shifting research about intellectual cognition, notably that most people are capable of the intellectual ability to attend college (Alvarez & Mehan, 2006). Efforts to detrack our classrooms gained momentum in the early 1990s with support from education agencies and the nonprofit sector alike (the Children's Defense Fund, the College Board, and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund), but “educators and policymakers attempting detracking found track structures extremely difficult to dismantle for various social, political, and cultural reasons” (Yonezawa, Wells & Serna, 2002, p. 38). The implacability of these hierarchies points to the entrenched discriminations from which tracking originated.

Many schools started to replace tracking with leveled courses in which students could select classes according to abilities: “theoretically, students were free to enroll in different levels of classes in different subjects, such as AP English and remedial mathematics, according to their proficiency in each area” (Worthy, 2010, p. 273). However, leveling, in name and in function, acted in the same pattern as tracking with very few students moving from the “basic” or “remedial” levels into the “honors” level. The fixed hierarchies remained as what Lucas (1999) calls a “hidden in-school stratification system,” a policy of tracking without calling it tracking (p. 137). Even though students could choose higher level classes, they typically did not because of the hierarchies entrenched through social if not formal structures – social norms and peer identification prevented many students from moving out of one group and into another (more to come on these reasons). According to Yonezawa, Wells & Serna (2002),

Choice eliminated the technical barriers in tracking processes for low-track students by allowing them to enroll in higher-track classes if they so chose. Yet it failed because it also continued the structural and cultural facets of low-, middle-, and high-track classes. It failed because it left intact the schools’ tracked structures. (p. 38)

This hidden school stratification gives students a false sense of control: students can work to reach a higher ability level, but the oppressive structures remain in place and continue to track students along socioeconomic and racial divisions. Despite growing concern about these stratifications, educators positioned homogenous grouping along ability levels as “helping students learn better, promoting equality and higher self-concepts, and making teaching and management easier” (Worthy, 2010, p. 274). This unsubstantiated rationale for homogenous grouping also provides a convenient justification for enacting the same hierarchies in school that pervade the larger society, ones that determine what society values and what it does not.

Tracking as a sanctioned privileged space. Schools sanction certain spaces and groups within the schools as having privileged meanings. We recognize honors and AP as exclusive and esteemed spaces – we call the teachers and students gifted, and we value those classes with more resources and with smaller class sizes. The message is clear: the top students are the ones that offer the most potential, that merit the best teaching, that deserve the best situations – and that earn the most funding. This message subtly (and not so subtly) reinforces the notion that gifted students have more worth to the school. The FTE (full time equivalency) for gifted classes weights the funding for gifted students as more than regular students – roughly two to one with \$2695 allocated to a general education student in a general education class and \$4493 for a gifted student in a gifted class (Eger, 2013). This tracking enacts the hierarchy that makes our classrooms political spaces. According to Yonezawa, Wells & Serna (2002),

We see tracked classes as more than physical places where students sit in separate rooms. Tracks are politically and socially significant spaces because we assign meaning to them, and thus they create and are created by the identities of the people within them... Academic tracks are important structural and cultural modifiers of schools. Tracks sort and separate students. But they also create within them high-track and low-track cultures that emphasize independence and self-expression on the one hand and control and conformity on the other. (p. 39, 50)

The loaded meaning inherent in leveled and tracked classrooms is that some students deserve the privilege of rich curricular content that offers free expression (with gifted teachers and gifted curriculum) while others do not. And the others often need to be controlled and contained within basic instruction. Yonezawa & Jones (2006) refer to that the “winner-take-all mentality” of so-called meritocratic tracking as a structure that mimics capitalist competition; Smith (2008) further connects the privileged space of honors and AP as one that prioritizes the significance of success in the same way as the business world:

[high-level students] are ‘salesmen’, able to speak to large groups of people; in fact, they may even dress in costume—or at least ‘dress the part’—to take on a specific role. They are flexible and responsive to changing schedules and situations. They work in various groups with people they may or may not know well. They are ready to take in new information. Such literacy behaviours as these are closely associated with today’s corporate culture, and, indeed, some suggest these behaviours should be a part of what all students do to prepare for what they may do beyond school. (p. 491)

Here the ability to play the part of the successful student positions the student as valuable to the school in the same way as the salesman with high volume is valuable to his company. On the high-track side of this hierarchy, the school values students as successful and in turn this privileged space “shape[s] students’ aspirations and influence[s] how students use choice-based placement policies” to attain ever-higher positions of success (Yonezawa, Wells & Serna, 2002, p. 50). A school’s success becomes a marker of prestige for the community, spurring real estate prices and further pressuring the school and the students to maintain a reputation of excellence.

In this (ostensibly) meritocratic system, the students that do not fit the successful norm become “othered” – the hierarchy does not recognize their potential or value their identity outside of the competition for high achievement. Schools stereotype low-achieving students as lazy or unmotivated or slow, and relegate them to low-tracked classroom with fewer resources, more students and often-inferior teaching (Worth, 2010; Oakes, 2005). All these problems serve

to diminish and ostracize, which only serves to multiply the problem of underachievement and disengagement. The problems of these hierarchies extend to bigger issues of political and social inequality in our society with higher rates of underachievement among racial, ethnic and socioeconomic minorities:

children from low-income or one-parent households, families with an unemployed worker, or linguistic and ethnic minority groups are more likely to be assigned to low-ability groups or tracks. Furthermore, African American and Latino students are consistently underrepresented in programs for the gifted and talented but overrepresented in special education programs. (Alvarez & Mehan, 2006).

Carbonaro (2005) notes that within schools,

oppositional cultures emerge from and are sustained by cultural differences across racial/ethnic and class boundaries. The anti-school norms fostered by these subcultures disengage students from the learning process, sap their desire to strive for academic success, and ultimately undermine their levels of academic achievement. (p. 30)

In this oppositional culture, the smart get smarter in the same way that the rich get richer.

Access to higher quality education benefits the privileged students who continue to excel leaving a bigger gap between them and the struggling students.

In Yonezawa, Wells & Serna's study of (2002) ten high schools with diverse student populations attempting to detrack, the researchers discovered that choice enrollment often only benefitted the already privileged students as disadvantaged students lacked access to the structures:

white and wealthy students took advantage of the school's waiver policy to avoid physical education and vocational education classes and enroll in advanced math and science courses. Information about Grant's waiver policy rarely reached the school's Black students, who generally took all of the district's "required" two years of physical education and three years of vocational education. (p 47)

Here the school's hierarchy – even despite the school's attempt to undo tracking policies – only extends the endemic problems of social inequality and further privileges the privileged and

others the othered. The problems of tracking come from the labels that identify students within loaded constructs and destructive stereotypes.

At Pruitt, the difference between high and low acts as a line of demarcation, with students jockeying for position along that line. On one side are the students who load their schedules with four, five and even six AP courses a semester and work on a seemingly unending list of extracurricular activities as a competitive form of college-resume building. These constructs value success and merit over all else, and validate the judgments that come from this “winner-take-all” mindset. On the other side of the line of demarcation are the students who cannot compete in the race for accolades and access, students who may construct rich identities outside of school but—in contrast to the pervasive culture of academic rigor—can only act out the identity of deficit. Not only do the hierarchical structures of ability-grouping sort and rank students into physical spaces that exacerbate the dichotomy but they exert powerful influence over how students begin to see themselves, their identities as learners and their social futures.

High-Level Labels, High-Level Expectations: Self Making in Honors and AP Tracks

In our honors and AP classes, we see students who carry both the power and the burden of high expectations. This privilege easily becomes a punishment, when students face the unending pressure and competition of holding on to the privileged label. In Yonezawa, Wells & Serna’s (2002) case study, they examined the status conferred by high-track classes and how this prestige proved an impediment to detracking. Meritocratic hierarchies confer this privileged position in the schools as a right inherent in their ability:

Students [who] ‘earn’ these titles and are placed accordingly into their ‘proper’ spaces within the educational system is an important aspect of the social consecration of the intergenerational transmission of privilege... These students and their parents operated from powerful places in the local hierarchy to reinforce existing educational inequities and garner the best teachers and courses. (p. 52, 53)

For students negotiating self-making in upper-track classes, this social position speaks to entitlement and empowerment that comes from their ability to easily navigate institutional norms, especially those predicated on achievement and success. According to Smith (2008), “Honours students use written and spoken texts to identify their expectations and write goals for themselves and others like them. They are given choices and are expected to participate in making those choices” (p. 491). Not only do high-achieving students come to see themselves as privileged and empowered but they come to see their peer group in the same way. Gee (2000-2001) argues,

Being singled out for special treatment and engaging in other sorts of special practices are today part of a system in which elite children come to share experiences with others like themselves... Such children come to feel an affinity for others like themselves--that is, those children headed toward elite colleges and top carriers in the new capitalism--an affinity based on their access to and sharing of such practices and experiences. Thus, they are forming a specific A-Identity as elites in the new capitalism. (p. 119)

Gee (2006) links these elite identities to the forward-looking focus on achievement that will prompt college admissions and entry into the white-collar work force; these “shape-shifting portfolio people” gain the abilities, achievements, and accolades both in the classroom and out (p. 182). The most successful teens, frequently those in high-ability classrooms and from middle class communities, will be the ones that prove themselves adaptable as new forms of capitalism evolve:

Individuals are not defined by fixed essential qualities, such as intelligence, culture, or skill; rather they are (and must come to see themselves as) an ever-changing ‘portfolio’ of rearrangeable skills... the new capitalism has a deep investment in creating what we might call ‘shape-shifting portfolio people,’ at least for more privileged rungs of the new capitalism. Shape-shifting portfolio people live to fill up their portfolios with attributes, achievements, and skills that they can flexibly rearrange as things change and new contexts demand that they redefine themselves. (Gee, 2000, p. 414).

In Gee’s argument, this adaptability becomes a new way of being, a continual evolving as one

acquires new skills through technological innovation and workplace evolution. Their ability to shape-shift in classrooms far more permissive than in on-level classrooms permits high-achieving students take on identities and interactions with teachers (and with the wider institution) that affirms their sense of empowerment and privilege (Yonezawa, Wells & Serna, 2002; Foust, 2009).

This entitled and empowered attitude hints at the esteem that comes from the high-track position in the school; however, the cost of maintaining privilege comes with fierce competition to remain at the top. Foust's (2009) case study of AP and IB programs in five urban high schools found the pressure to perform in high track programs not just to be the pressure to excel and learn, but the pressure to uphold the identity of the high-excelling AP or IB student. To that end, students put in endless hours to preserve that identity at the cost of other forms of self-making:

Not only did the workload in AP and IB courses limit some students' ability to participate in extracurricular activities, many reported that they needed to use every spare moment—during lunch, during non-AP or non-IB classes, and outside of school—to finish their work (p. 301)

Yonezawa & Jones (2006) point out that students felt that they had to work endless hours with no sleep to preserve their position in the privileged program: “Advanced placement and honors students were acutely aware that one misstep could result in moving down in any given subject” (p. 19). That pressure becomes an ingrained and unavoidable stress, one that Foust (2009) calls “self-imposed” (p. 302). An IB student participating in his study described the pressure: “It's that whole thing ingrained in my head: I must get an A or else I explode” (Foust, 2009, p. 302). The violence conveyed in this pressure seems to indicate that their self-perceptions are caught up in the label of an A-earning AP student. With the competition for college admissions increasing every year, especially among top-tier colleges boasting 5% acceptance rates as a source of pride (Pérez-Peña, 2014), high-achieving students more than ever feel they must pack their college

resumes with all forms of achievements (academics, sports, arts, extracurriculars). The fear of falling short has resulted in astounding levels of depression and anxiety (Abeles, 2016, January 2), and even in a startling rise of suicide rates among deferred college applicants (Bruni, 2015, April 11).

Gee (2000) acknowledges that the teens who manage shape-shifting tend to fixate on the portfolio rather than the shape-shifting (or expansion): “[Upper middle class teens] already fashion themselves in terms of (anxiety-filled) movement through ‘achievement space’ wherein they accrue skills, attributes, attitudes, and achievement as capital that will make them worthy of success” (p. 419). This “achievement space” is what defines the ambitious and anxiety-filled students in high-stakes classrooms. In Phelan, Cao, and Davidson’s (1992) study, high-achieving students (those deemed with congruent home and school worlds in their typology) experienced obsessive and traumatic levels of stress when faced with an academic shortcoming: one student slamming his hand into a door and breaking it, another student dying from an enlarged heart, and another student attempting suicide on two separate occasions. For these high-pressured students, the cost of losing the A would be more than just a hit to their GPA, it would mean that they would lose the “self-making” they have constructed around the identity of an AP student.

The pressure of upholding the label not only necessitates hard work but also enacts an illusionary performance of what it means to be a high-track student. Whatever it takes to hold on to the sanction that comes with high-track privilege is what honors students will do. In Smith’s year-long ethnography (2008) of a collaborative, team-taught model for honors instruction, she observed the way that honors students sometimes enact just the face of intellectualism without the depth: “Performance of the identity of ‘honours students’ also emphasized superficial

characteristics: speaking loudly and enthusiastically, working with (although not necessarily developing relationships with) a variety of people, dressing to play a role, creating eye-catching displays of one's work" (p. 501) Her observations recorded that this superficiality came not just from the students but from the teachers. Students came to understand that teachers were more impressed by flashy visuals than deep thinking; thus, the students learned to subvert the system with animated PowerPoints, colorful displays and energetic presentations: more style than substance. Smith refers to Pope's (2001) study about the lengths that high-track students will go to "accumulate the accolades that they perceive will help assure their future success, students 'participate in behaviour of which they are not proud. They learn to cheat, kiss up, form treaties, contest school decisions, and act in ways that run counter to explicit or implicit school rules and guidelines' (qtd. in Smith, 2008, p. 485). What this performance of achievement indicates is the importance of fulfilling the identity preordained by the institution.

For students positioned as overachievers with more demands than hours in the day, they may engage in the kinds of "doing school" that teachers would consider perfunctory or disingenuous (Dyson, 1988). In Pope's (2001) study of a high-performing school, students noted that staying on top of their overfilled schedules mandated cheating: skipping class on test days, sharing assignments, plagiarizing projects and papers. Thus students "learned how to hide their deception and in which classrooms these practices were tacitly allowed," suggesting that the appearance of overachievement is a tacit performance on the part of students *and* teachers (p. 152). Learning to play the games of competitive schooling means appearing compliant and complicit to the positional identity (one of a student working all hours and excelling at all subjects). Students neither accept nor reject this positional identity, but subvert those tacit norms through an undercurrent of rebellion. As teachers consider how to build forms of authentic

learning for students obsessed by grades and beset by competitive pressure, our challenge becomes to destabilize labels and to widen the social positioning that comes with the so-called meritocratic systems of tracking.

Regular Classes, Regular Students: Self Making in On-Level Tracks

Outside the sites of privilege in honors and AP classes, on-level students walk through classroom doors, coming face-to-face with an institutional perspective that sees them for what they are not, rather than for what they are or what they could be. The tacit discourse of deficit implied in hierarchical tracks attempts to position “non-honors” or “regular” students as lacking: lacking effort, lacking attention, lacking ability and ambition, lacking test scores. Even the language of risk inherent in the terms used to describe non-honors spaces connotes messages of disadvantage, deficiency and difference (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Vasudevan & Campano, 2009); often these coded messages match patterns of exclusion and regulation in the broader society, linking back to the historical origins of tracking to sort, rank and exclude. In Shafer, Olexa and Polk (1972), the deficit viewpoint matches socioeconomic divides between those with access to upward mobility and those without:

College-bound students are academically more able, learn more rapidly, should not be deterred in their progress by slower, non-college-bound students and need courses for college preparation which non-college-bound students do not need. By the same token, it is thought that non-college-bound students are less bright, learn more slowly, should not be expected to learn as fast or learn as much as college-bound students, and need only a general education or work-oriented training. (p. 240)

Despite the intention of the detracking movement to collapse tracks from three (honors, regular, remedial) to two (honors, regular) and to mitigate the explicit meaning of incapacity from remedial tracks, the progressive goal founders in the stickiness of deficit thinking:

Considering the word regular, these classes should logically be expected to have instruction like middle-level classes rather than low-level or basic classes (The American

Heritage Dictionary 1982, p. 1041)... However, since there was no low or basic level class, it appeared some teachers in this study substituted the word regular for the concept low or basic. (Worthy, 2010, p. 32)

The confluence between regular and low is not just a matter of semantics; our students might take on diminished views of their academic potential in school and after, and settle for diminished views of themselves as learners. Kelly (2008) draws on Rosenbaum's (1975) work at the forefront of the detracking movement, citing the tendency for lower-track students to internalize the deficits intrinsic to the institutional labels. When schools position students as at-risk or remedial, these types of labels become "self-fulfilling prophecies" in that students form their in-school identities and activities around what school expects of them; positive expectations yield positive effort and participation, while negative expectations yield negative behavior and resistance to the social positioning (Schafer, Olexa and Polk, 1972, p. 250).

Likewise, Oakes' (1985) study of twenty-five schools and survey of 13,000 teens tracked into low-level classes showed signs of internalization and legitimization; they reported positive attitudes about their school but negative attitudes about themselves (in comparison to higher-track students who reported positive attitudes about their school and themselves). Oakes (1985) concludes, "Students are trained to view as legitimate the principles that govern the existing social order (the unequal distribution of power and material goods) and to see themselves as largely responsible for their own places in it" (p. 145). Students may also withhold participation or effort when the institutional discourses relegate them to positional identities incongruent with the way they view themselves. In her study of African American girls positioned as underachievers, Fordham (1993) found that the girls who acquiesced to the way school positioned them as loud and disruptive scored substantially higher on standardized tests than their GPAs would indicate; abilities and levels of achievement unrecognized by the classroom

and by the institution become hidden in the performance of the identities (slacker, disruptor, clown) expected in the polarized social worlds of tracking. The ways that students take up and take on these identities of deficit precipitates the biggest impediment to engagement and participation; students who feel little sense of belonging or value seldom invest themselves in school and classroom activity.

For students positioned by “discourses of student deficit,” apathy as the withdrawal of effort and engagement may be one of the only forms of agency, in an institution that denies individuals of complex selves outside of deficit-rooted-labels (Vasudevan & Campanos, 2009, p. 313). Students labeled and marginalized by terms of risk, disability and deficit are in a sense rendered invisible by the labels that reduce their identity to aspects of a whole. Students categorized by the institutional discourses of special education, in particular, deal with labels that exclude large parts of their identity and reduce their sense of being to a pathologized label of deficit. Hudak (2001) notes that when special education students walk through classroom doors on the first day of school, they may already be sorted and [mis]understood by teachers who see the students only by their exceptionalities and accommodations. The problem, as Hudak (2001) sees it, is the “staying power” of these labels when students begin to “live out” the labels and also to put up defense mechanisms that protect the students from the damage that comes from having their true selves remain unacknowledged (p. 10). Drawing on Freire’s (1997/1970) concept of true words and inauthentic ones as the power of true words (rooted in reflection and action) alone to inspire transformation, Hudak (2001) notes that students with special needs in particular hide their true selves (their complete identities) under the mantle of the false identities (those perpetuated by labels of deficit and exceptionality). The effort to protect oneself from the damage of these labels is the withdrawal of authenticity, participation, and engagement:

For the student whose False Self has assumed dominance in its effort to hide the True Self, the world becomes deadened. It is no wonder that as the intellect [in the academic rigor of schooling] acquires more prominence, students become literally out of touch, both with themselves and with reality. They no longer feel themselves or the world; they become numb. (Hudak, 2001, p. 20)

For some students positioned by discourses of disability and difference, the invisibility they feel might become the invisibility they act out while in the classroom. Without a positional identity to call on, students may, according to the way Hudak sees the problem, have no way to express and develop the identities they may express outside the classroom. Through years of positioning by the institutional discourses of tracking, students' positional identities as disabled or deficient thicken to the point where they may no longer challenge that positionality.

For students with learning disabilities and other special needs, the polarizing social worlds of tracking exacerbates the stigma of exceptionality. Shirfer (2013) draws on Goffman's (1963) work of social exclusion and othering to examine how students with learning disabilities feel that teachers and peers in the social world of schooling perceives them to be lazy, incapable, unmotivated, or even stupid. Labeling theory, according to Shirfer (2013), posits that the stigmatization and marginalization of students with learning disabilities is more severe than students simply deemed low-achieving; the label of learning disability exerts much power in the way teachers perceive students and in the way that students begin to perceive themselves. In the same ways that people conflated mental illness with associations of deviance in past centuries (evil, diseased, impure, possessed), students with learning disabilities may take on feelings of deviance in highly tracked school settings where the markers of success (grades, GPA, and even athletics) predominate, and leave students feeling othered and excluded. Phelan, Link and Dovodio (2008), also drawing on Goffman's (1963) work, posit three ways that social environments perpetuate a sense of stigma on those deemed deviant or lacking:

- through “exploitation and domination,” which the researchers call “keeping people out” as in the way that the dominant social group holds more power and resources to the exclusion of those with fewer.
- through “enforcement of social norms,” or “keeping people in” as in the way that the so-called deviant group is made to conform and uphold the standards of the dominant group. Through stigma and pressure, the deviant group is made to understand “the boundaries of acceptable behavior and identity and the consequences for non-conformity.”
- through “avoidance of disease,” or “keeping people away” as in the way that the dominant group fears the deviant group and views the deviant group as less than contributing members of the social group. (p. 7-8)

In the case of a highly tracked school setting, being a part of the dominant group of high-achieving students would ensure more attention, more time, and more recognition than the students in the exploited group. It would seem that the feeling of being kept out of the school’s definition of success and of successful identity would contribute to the feeling of falseness described by Hudak as a sense of dissociated emptiness as the deviant groups is pressured to conform and uphold the very norms that exclude them.

Students stigmatized or barred from the trajectories of success may turn resistant or silent to the social worlds that exclude them. Duff (2002) refers to the silencing of students as “apparently disconnected from peers, curriculum, activities, and discourse in the mainstream; or they are positioned by others in contradictory ways, as citizens and/or non-citizens, as model students and/or stigmatized, deficient students” (p. 290). Teachers of on-level students often speak of the need to regulate and control, but teachers fail to consider that the confrontations and insubordination start with the school’s positioning of students, through self-fulfilling labels. Moll (2004) call this form of opposition a response to a “pedagogy of control” noting that “power never goes unchallenged, [that] it always produces friction, resistance and contestation” (p. 126). As students resist or renegotiate inequitable institutional positioning, it becomes clear

that that teachers must foster new ways of becoming in the classroom. Holland et al. (1998) refer to the development of identity as socially constructed at the positioning of discourses and cultural models:

Socially constructed selves, in sharp contrast [to stable and enduring selves], are subject to positioning by whatever powerful discourses they happen to encounter... Perhaps they are resistant to such social forces; they nonetheless remain provisionally at their mercy. (p. 26-27)

As much as students may resist or reject the institutional positioning, these discourses project on the background of their development of socially-constructed selves, and students may begin to take on diminished senses of self at school, if they do not have the supportive resources (in the form of friend groups, alternate discourses, or inclusive social spaces) to renegotiate those delimiting positionalities.

However, all is not hopeless. Holland et al. (1998) theorize the process of transgressing these powerful discourses through imagining “collectively realized ‘as if’ realms” where social groups can imagine new possibilities (p. 49). In schools that position students as mediocre or deficient, students often call on identities in resistance to schooling-imposed ones; and students, denied self-making in school, engage in positive self-making outside of school, constructed among friends who share the same social positioning, and often made in opposition to school.

If students do not outwardly reject or renegotiate a positional identity as a low-achieving student, they may instead subvert that identity to meet their own social or personal purposes. In the highly competitive field of schooling, students may take up and adapt positional identities as high achievers or low achievers to keep playing the game of high school. For students positioned as underachievers, those deemed lacking the ambition or drive to succeed, their participation within these norms may not be compliance but rather a subversion of the discourses of deficit. Rather than an outright rejection of school activity, their attitudes to school may partly comply

with their positionality and also covertly reject and figure other ways of being. In Willis' important case study of "the lads," a countercultural group of working class teens in Hammerstown, England, their attitudes and response to a school that judged them on the failing end of working class stood in opposition to the school authority, and it hinged on their collective activity as a peer group. Willis (1977) describes the lads' response to school as "a caged resentment which always stops just short of outright confrontation... There is aimless air of insubordination ready with spurious justification and impossible to nail down" (p. 12-13).

Outside of school, students marginalized in school may also find spaces for multi-faceted selves and self-worth. Alvermann's (2007) study looking at the out-of-school literacy habits of students labeled as remedial draws on the concept of figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998). Students marginalized in school were able to refigure their identity as students who "tell others how they spend their time outside of school, they are in effect telling themselves who they are, including who they are as readers" (Alvermann, 2007, p. 42). In the social context of the after-school literacy program surrounded by many students also labeled as struggling readers, students who actively resisted academic reading practices during the school day renegotiated the label of struggling reader by developing literacy practices through their out-of-school interests and identities.

But the opposite of Alvermann's findings is easy to imagine when students labeled with the discourses of risk and remediation do not find a way to renegotiate their selves at school; they do not find ways to express themselves as readers within the school setting and in resistance to the discourses that marginalize them. In Moje's (2000) study of students alienated within the school setting, students who do not find recognition of themselves as reader, writer and thinker

with agentic senses of self in the school setting look for that belonging elsewhere, in the case of Khek through the tagging culture of graffiti:

Growing up in a context in which her ethnicity, color, and social class did not make it easy for her to be part of the dominant story, Khek looked for other stories, stories in which she could be a valued participant. Khek's words illustrate that young people may turn to gang-connected literacy and language practices as a way of writing themselves into the world. (p. 652)

For teens who go unrecognized as valued participants in school through alienating discourses of meritocracy and achievement, they may resist the social positioning and seek senses of agency and belonging elsewhere. In this way, the identity and literacy practices within the social worlds of school may be the least important in the experiences of shaping self. Withdrawing effort, enthusiasm and participation may be the only course of action in an academic social world that saddles them with the stigma of risk and remediation, or even just averageness in high-competition schools. The possibility of renegotiation starts with a much more significant repositioning, that of the purpose of school. In classrooms and in schools at large, students need a broader scope for what it means to be a student – with many ways to be successful.

Challenging a *telos* that predominantly sanctions one positional identity (that of the AP student), rather than many, opens pathways for participation and ways of being: students could be deemed successful in constructing and performing many different identities: artists or craftspersons, coders or tinkerers, musicians or poets, designers or entrepreneurs. With a broadened scope, those negotiations of positionality would be brought into the open, a part of the daily life of American high schools, breaking down the dichotomy between high and low achievement.

The Social Worlds of Institutional Labeling

As much potential as social worlds hold for renegotiating identities, the operation of sorting and tracking does not stop with institutional positioning but permutes many other ways

that students experience school: the ways tracked students form friend groups, remaining friends with those in the same academic track (Kubitschek & Hallinan, 1987); the ways tracked students perceive their activity within the school and the degree to which they become involved in sports and extracurricular activities (Schafer, Olexa and Polk, 1972; Kelly, 2008). In the way that hierarchies become more defined, social groupings become more divided along lines of demarcation. Vanfossen, Jones and Spade's (1987) analysis of survey data from highly-tracked students in sophomore and again in senior year found that the social impact of tracking (feelings of self-concept, feelings of belonging, peer group selection) become "not only outcomes of tracking but reinforcements of tracking, since they are likely to elevate even further the academic achievement and aspirations of students in the academic track" (p. 115). The students most connected to a school culture defined by achievement align in a peer group that propels them toward even higher degrees of ambition and pressure.

In the school where I teach, higher-level students engage in a form of competitive schooling as students take note of who takes more AP classes, of who scores an A on the APUSH test, of who earns more quality points (the extra GPA weight for AP and honors classes). The bond between high-track students seems to give them a chance to debrief and to defray the pressures of their ambition, but it also seems to exacerbate the competitive nature of the GPA and college admissions race.

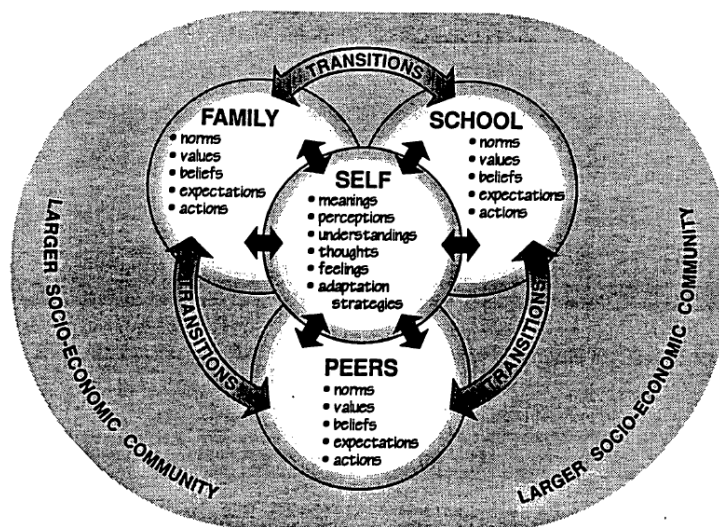
If affiliations in higher-track social groups coalesce around shared experiences of pressure and ambition, then senses of belonging in lower-track social groups start with shared attitudes of resistance and rebellion. The exclusion of authentic selves through institutional positioning in the classroom can exact a staunch resistance to school activities, and this resistance to school only thickens as groups of marginalized students coalesce in school-resistant

friend groups. According to Kelly (2008), “Over time, student attitudes in different track classrooms become polarized, with anti-school attitudes being concentrated primarily among low track students” (p. 2). The very polarization of groups into higher and lower tracks seems to exacerbate the way students take up the traits associated with these identities: high-achieving students become more driven, low-achieving students become more disenfranchised. Gilbert and Yerrick’s (2001) case study of students in lower-track science classes (with the typical institutional issues: higher class sizes, more inexperienced teachers, less lab time) notes the bond between students in the class described as a “lower track microculture through lack of academic achievement and general school apathy” (p. 582). As a social network, the microculture stands in opposition to the dominant school culture and requires that students form attitudes of resistance and even aggression for the school’s dominant culture, even to the point where students in the microculture who “cut ties” and take higher track classes are deemed defectors by the group. The importance of group identity becomes especially important for students who do not form connections and affiliations in the conventional school culture. Kelly (2008) draws on Tajfel & Turner’s (1979) social identity theory as the work of individuals to find value in school and to gain and maintain belonging and acceptance among peers; for students who do not find value in school, they do not seek to belong in conventional school activities such as extracurricular activities but rather seek this sense of belonging among students who share a similar mindset. The problem that arises is that this belonging, predicated on anti-school attitudes, reproduces and reinforces those resistant attitudes.

In Phelan, Cao, and Davidson’s (1992) ethnographic study of the stresses and pressures faced by high school students and the impact of those stresses on students’ engagement with school, they utilize their previous model (Phelan, Cao, and Davidson, 1991) of Students’

Multiple Worlds, a heuristic which explores the social roles students enact between the worlds of self, family, school and peers as well as the larger socioeconomic world, and which seeks to understand how students cross borders with ease or with difficulty between these multiple worlds (see Figure 1). Rather than looking at students' experience of school in isolation, the model seeks to see school as part of students' more complex interrelationship with competing social roles (much in the same way that Beach, Parks and Thein (2003) seek to complicate the construction and performance of identity based upon the competing social worlds in which students navigate). While their study only hints at the influence of institutional labels and tracking, we might look at the different ways that students navigate school and see the ways that students in upper tracks as opposed to lower tracks differ in their attitudes toward school and identities as students based on tracks (or the congruence between worlds of school and home).

Figure 1. Phelan, Cao, and Davidson's (1992) Model of Students' Multiple Worlds



Adapted from Phelan, Cao, and Davidson (1992, p. 4)

Phelan, Cao, Davidson's (1994) typology includes the following levels relevant to the ways we might think about how students navigate the heavily labeled social worlds of school:

- **Students of congruent worlds who smoothly and easily cross borders between social worlds (Type I):** these typically high-achieving students from upper and middle class backgrounds find a great deal of congruence with values of school but also face intense pressure to be successful. In Phelan, Cao, and Davidson's study, 90% of the students studied who fit the classification of congruence were successful in school and exemplify high-achieving, high-track students. Reporting their greatest stress as grades and college admissions, six students even experiencing traumatic stress in response to academic setbacks. A participant in the study admits, "It bothers me [when teachers just focus on how great learning is] because it makes messing up even harder to take. Because you think more and more, 'Gee, now it's not just my grades, it's my future.' ...As a result, I typically don't really relax too much" (p. 10). With congruence between home and school, the advantage of supportive home worlds could mean the expectation of success in the form of high-status GPAs and college admissions. But the pressure of achievement and success seems to shift the purpose of academic work from learning to the accolades and access that comes with achievement.
- **Students of different worlds but who manage to cross borders between social worlds (Type II):** these students may come from worlds with divergent norms and values, perhaps originating from communities of different cultures, racial or ethnic backgrounds. These students manage to "adjust and reorient" to the contextual differences between worlds, and may take on the appearance of congruent types; however, these students battle feelings of doubt, discomfort and apprehension, feelings that often go unacknowledged by teachers who see them as well-adjusted (p. 15). Students in Phelan, Cao, and Davidson's study report feelings of difference in comparison to students who easily embody the academic world, these feelings of difference tend to silence them out of fear of looking "dumb" or of confronting the prejudice of their peers. In this space of classroom assimilation, students may feel pressured to fit in and to close the border between home and school, denying the social worlds of home and community to perform the identity of successful school student.
- **Students of different worlds who find it difficult to cross borders between social worlds (Type III):** The feelings of isolation characteristic of the Type II students magnify for the students who find it much more difficult to acculturate to academic expectations. The differences between home and school tend to make academic content and teaching styles more alienating, leaving students with feelings of boredom, frustration, and insecurity. According to Phelan, Cao, and Davidson, "Inability to concentrate, tuning out, viewing school as boring—all are consequences that occur when students have difficulty understanding material in classes where teachers fail to perceive students' learning needs" (p. 19). Where Type II students tend to move between honors and on-level tracks and tend to pass into the high-ability social worlds, Type III students remain cloistered with their like-minded peers in on-level or remedial courses, and while they find value in school in terms of

their futures, they report few teachers willing to invest the time and caring to help them become successful, feeling that teachers see only their deficits rather than assets.

- **Students of different worlds who resist crossings between social worlds (Type IV):**

These students are the ones who seem to have given up, who refuse to do coursework, who feel a sense of alienation from teachers, peers and from the institution of schooling. In Phelan, Cao, and Davidson's study, this resistance to the social world of school often manifests as a form of aggression, with students perceiving themselves to be the targets of judgment and prejudice. One participant reports,

Yeah it's weird, 'cause most teachers, you know—white teachers, some of them are kind of prejudiced... It's probably the way they look at you, the way they talk, you know when they're talking about something—about something like when they talk about the people who are going to drop out, and they... look around, look around [at you]... (p. 25)

What students seem to internalize is their feeling of being a problem, of failing to meet the norm the school deems successful, of hopelessness in their lives as students and in their lives beyond the school. However, many Type IV students in the Phelan, Cao, and Davidson's study still report their wish to graduate, to become successful, and their anxiety stems from their worry that they will never be able to reach their goals. Phelan, Cao, Davidson describe students who alternate between desperation and despondency, paralysis and apathy, and irrational optimism and dreams. Their alienation from the schools' conventional social worlds leaves them with no solution but further resistance and alienation. Few schools offer counseling or help that speaks to students' needs when they fall from the schools' norms. In their sites of study, Phelan, Cao and Davidson describe counseling centered on raising GPAs, taking SATs and ACTs, applying for colleges, all conventional needs for students who fit Type I and II identities and social worlds. The gulf between social worlds grows ever wider, leaving students with little means for crossing borders.

Despite the differences inherent in the typology, Phelan, Cao, and Davidson's study found that the majority of students – across all four types – reported great deals of stress having to do with school (78% report that family stress centered on parents pressuring them toward school success). This shared experience of pressure could seem to suggest that students share more than they seem. What differentiates students is not innate abilities or identities but their socially-mediated ability to cross social borders. This typology recalls Gee's (200-2001) analysis of

identity in that the degree to which students seem capable of crossing borders between social contexts depends upon the ways they navigate institutional and discourse identities.

In Holland et al.'s (1998) discussion of identity, Holland recalls an incident in Naudada, Nepal where they interviewed several women of different castes, women who would not be permitted to cross boundaries and inhabit the same spaces. Gyanumaya, a woman of the lower caste, out of respectful (or required) avoidance of a higher-caste woman in the interior of the house, scaled the outside of the house in order to meet with Holland. Holland et al. write,

Perhaps the presence and proximity of these higher-caste persons invoked an implicit discourse of caste that held sway in many contexts of life in Naudada, a discourse about relations between members of different castes... Her behavior was not an index of the cultural impetus of a caste identity *embodied* in her, but of the social significance of a caste identity imposed on her. (p. 11, emphasis in original)

What this narrative makes clear is the impact of culturally-constructed hierarchies on social activity; these hierarchies limit the degree and ability to which individuals cross borders enacted by social groups and cultural models. It would seem that if societal constructs can be imposed on individual's actions and identities, then it would also seem that if we could acknowledge those impositions, we could undo some of the more damaging hierarchies. In terms of tracking and labeling, we might consider the ways in which calling into question the borders between hierarchies and the ways that students find borderlands between home and school selves would allow for an easing of these hierarchies.

Teaching that Reinforces Labels and Polarizes Social Worlds:

Regulating and Othering the Low; Pressuring and Privileging the High

In our classrooms, teachers might take on the potential of easing hierarchies, but more frequently, these hierarchies infiltrate teachers' thinking about what their students at various levels are capable of. Teachers may subconsciously design opportunities for rich learning

according to the level—frequently in the high track, rarely in the low (Caughlan and Kelly, 2004; Smith, 2008). Teachers also may make broad generalizations without specifics about the exciting and rewarding work they do with honors classes and the difficulties of motivating and engaging regular classes (Worthy, 2010). The question this helps me ask is how much do we as teachers perpetuate this problem, with the way we perceive our students and conceive our classes? To what extent can a teacher cognizant of the impact this thinking exerts shift what's possible: if teachers do not allow the hierarchies to shift their thinking, could the students as well forget the structure?

Inadvertently/Intentionally affirming stereotypes.

In the way that teachers perceive differences between high-track and low-track classes, they reinforce those perceptions in both subtle and overt ways. Worthy (2010) noted in observations and interviews of teachers in high- and low-track classes the use of generalizations about group identification, applying the traits of a stereotype to the entire group:

Teachers rarely mentioned individual students; instead, they drew broad generalizations... They described students as having certain characteristics based on their class placement, and these characteristics seemed to be considered static and immutable, as illustrated by the use of phrases like 'these kids,' 'my regulars,' and 'their parents'... Students in low classes were also described as being slow underachievers who needed to develop discipline and were not interested in learning. (p. 279)

Teachers would seem to draw on the same internalized discourses as students, seeing students framed by their tracks without the idiosyncratic qualities that distinguish each students. Looking for types of students, teachers might only see those types, and fail to see individuals. The talk that Worthy describes pervades so many teachers' lounges and perpetuates the types of dichotomous thinking that restricts classes into prescribed activity.

Not only do teachers tend to see their students through these prescribed perspectives, but they also reproduce those perspectives through subtle messages. Students may pick up on subtle

and overt messages, when teachers talk about the strengths of honors students and limitations of regular students. The students in Yonezawa and Jones' (2006) study easily see the difference:

Tracking, students argued, widened the achievement gap with weaker students often getting less attentive, caring, and knowledgeable teachers. Students reported that AP teachers often had higher expectations of their students, appeared to spend more time planning and preparing for those classes, and openly stated that they preferred to teach those classes. (Yonezawa & Jones, 2006)

In Phelan, Cao, and Davidson's (1994) study, resistant students (Type IV in their typology) feel that teachers fail to see them as anything but a stereotype, one rooted in their deficits (particularly the difference between them and students of high-achieving tracks (Type I and II)).

One participant describes a feeling of humiliation in the way teachers address her peers:

And I was sitting down looking for my papers because I just barely walked in and—not even a minute ago—[the teacher] walks by and he goes—he points at me and he goes 'nonworker' and then he point at those two girls and he goes, 'the talkers' and then he point at all these white people and he goes 'the worker, the worker, the worker,' and I just like, you know, 'what is it?' You know. (p. 25)

At their very worst, these prescribed perspectives go beyond dichotomies of asset and deficit and work to perpetuate other stereotypes of race, gender or class, repurposing the forms of social exclusion buried in the history of tracking.

Privileging engagement, deep-thinking, and dialogue.

Despite a widening achievement gap between high track and low track classes (Yonezawa & Jones, 2006), the instructional practices in low-track classrooms continue to exacerbate the problem. Teachers in high-track classes often employ high-engagement, high-cognition learning practices to set up opportunities for intellectual development and deep thought; however, teachers in low-track classes often employ routine practices based on basic skills. Lower expectations (of lower-track classes) translate to instructional activities that lack

intellectual rigor, complex problem solving, real-world applications (Alvarez & Mehan, 2006).

According to Worthy (2010),

the focus [in regular classes] was on isolated and basic skills, along with reading in decontextualized text, using simple materials within a rigidly controlled setting. The common rationale for these differences echoed reasoning from the earliest instantiations of ability grouping, that teachers were supplying what was best for students and what they needed. (p. 280)

Smagorinsky (2011) refers to Cole's (1996) concept of cultural schemata for the ways that cultural models and patterns form and organize our thinking, rather than the prior experiences associated with strictly cognitive schemata. For students persistently presented with rote and menial work situated in historical patterns of regulation, the pattern stabilizes itself and contributes to the self-fulfilling prophecy of students becoming (seemingly) incapable of anything more than isolated skills work and test preparation. Thus the symbolic meaning of the lower track becomes a justification for lower expectations and a rationale for inferior schooling. In Worthy's study, many teachers of low-level classes perceive their students as needing "very structured environment[s]" with authoritarian control, extensive seatwork, few opportunities for collaboration (p. 280).

In these environments of control, students do not have the opportunity for rich and meaningful thought, the work necessary for the challenges of a changing world. Gee (2000) points out that marginalized teens often fail to develop the shape-shifting portfolio identities necessary for success in our society today, often because the social world of school nurtures the identities of school-successful students but not school-resistant ones:

[working class teens] often view school and other public sphere institutions, and sometimes the adults in their own families, as representing an authority that rarely seems to respond to them in affective, dialogic or interactional ways, but does so mostly in terms of decontextualized facts, laws, and rules (and stand-alone literacy). (p. 441)

In Gee's discussion, students who lack the social capital (Bourdieu, 2011) to engage in portfolio-shifting identities and practices stand outside the pathways of success; school does not act as this site of competitive development.

Most necessary to the development of these shape-shifting identities is the opportunity for dialogue and discussion, the form of social interchange where students can exchange ideas and encounter multiple perspectives. Sadly this form of discourse is mostly missing from regular classes. In Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran's (2003) large-scale quantitative study of 64 middle and high school classrooms found that "the observed maximum for average minutes of open discussion per hour in low-track classes was 3.7, as opposed to 14.5 in high-track classes" (p. 719). What these numbers startlingly reveal is the irregularity of meaningful discussion in regular courses, which Applebee et al. (2003) describe as:

- More use of authentic questions, which were used to explore differing understandings rather than to "test" what students might already know;
- More time for open discussion: whole-class discourse devoted to free exchange of ideas among students or between at least three participants; and
- More "uptake," in which a teacher's question "took up" and built on a student's previous comment, creating continuity in the discourse. (p. 690)

The wide gap between the rote work teachers design for low-track classes and the critical thinking for high-track classes contributes to the high levels of disengagement and disenfranchisement in low-track classes; students see the difference, experience the difference. Applebee et al. (2003) go on to identify the ways that low-track classes shortchange students in meaningful literacy practices: unequal teaching quality with highly-reputed teachers moving into higher tracks, more text complexity in the higher track, less academic work in the lower track, and of course less discussion. The fundamental problem is that teachers in higher track classes have higher expectations, and our students know it. They come in and live up to the expectations that we have for them rather than giving them a chance to rise to the occasion.

Classrooms that stabilize fixed patterns of participation informed by institutional discourses of high and low achievement acculturate students to a pedagogical pattern set out from elementary school; they often go through days on end in “lifeless but orderly classrooms” agreed upon by a “‘treaty’ in which low academic demands are treaded for good behavior” (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1990, p. 3, 2); teachers and students work in cooperation to “get through the lesson” that offer the appearance of learning but perhaps not the actuality (Bloome, Puro and Theodorou, 1989, p. 282). In looking at the cultural meanings and social systems of classrooms, Bloome, Puro, and Tehodorou (1989) theorize procedural display as the cultural and social practices of classrooms where the cooperative performance of learning supersedes actual learning:

Procedural display is (a) the display by teacher and students, to each other, of a set of academic and interactional procedures that themselves count as the accomplishment of a lesson, and (b) the enactment of lesson is not necessarily related to the acquisition of intended academic or nonacademic content or skills but is related to the set of cultural meanings and values held by the local education community for classroom education. Procedural display can be compared to a group of actors who have memorized their roles and who enact a play for each other’s benefit without necessarily knowing what happens in the play or what the play means. (p. 272)

In thinking about procedural display as a performance, I see students who have long learned their parts (much like Lortie’s apprenticeship of observation (2009)) – the expected response, the gesture of engagement, the guise of thinking, and I see myself as a teacher who has cooperated with this performance. Just as the middle school teacher in the Bloome, Puro, and Tehodorou (1989) study, I know the students are not learning, are not engaged and yet I persist in getting through it; I stubbornly hold on to some notion of the accepted and needed lessons even as students check out.

Matsuov (2011) looks towards conventional and authoritarian classrooms (teacher-centered in knowledge transmission) as allowing student agency only so far as they comply with the rules of disengagement through overly scripted forms of pedagogy:

1. Do unconditionally what the teacher asks you to do (behaviorally, educationally, intellectually, relationally, morally, and so on)
2. Try to understand what the teacher wants from you.
3. Put your efforts, industry, eagerness, intelligence toward what the teacher assigns as well and as much as possible, based on the teacher's judgment of what "well" means.
4. Censor your own agendas, desires, genres, and actions that are not sanctioned by the teacher.
5. Restrain and do not support other students who disrupt and deviate from the teacher's assignments.
6. Postpone your self-actualization and goal-defining processes until the "grown-up" future, when education is over (or at least when the school day is over and you are outside of the school time and space...)
7. Actively desire to do 1-6. (Matusov, 2011, p. 28-29)

It is the paradoxical seventh rule that speaks to the power of schooling to shape students' responses to learning based on the implicit purposes of school – the moving towards success and achievement as defined by the school setting and the larger social forces that shape school.

Playing the game of school by the rules means suppressing one's individual interests and purposes to appear as if one "actively desired" to only do school in the way that the classroom and the larger institution define it.

As a qualitative companion to the statistical study Applebee et al. (2003) conducted of English classes' discussion activities in differently-tracked English classrooms, Caughlin and Kelly (2004) observed one teacher for her teaching practices (in the same school Applebee et al. studied). The problems of tracking come in the insidious way that hierarchies impact a teacher's perspective, a teacher (arguably caring and kind) who enacts rich, meaningful discourse to her honors classes and rote, perfunctory discourse in her on-level classes. She means well, but her preconceptions about low-track students upend her intentions and reduce the potential for

meaningful discourse. Teachers, as much as students, tend to internalize and legitimize the dichotomies of tracking, and to enact discourses and activities that stabilize these norms.

Acknowledging the historical-rootedness and the social-situatedness of these activities sheds light on how our actions in the classroom disadvantage students that do not fit schooled norms, and unwittingly privilege students who too easily fit the norms, leading to a damaging divide in our classes and schools.

Sanctioning a singular trajectory and definition of success

Bloome, Puro, and Tehodorou (1989) see the implicit cooperation between student and teachers inherent in procedural display as a result of the underlying cultural meaning and social system based on two key societal values: the ideal of progress and the centrality of literacy. Parents, teachers and students share the value for moving forward rather than standing still — for advancing from elementary to middle to high, and most notably to college and successful careers, and the central importance of literacy to make that trajectory possible. Likewise, Smagorinsky (2011) theorizes *telos* (explicit trajectories) and *prolepsis* (implicit trajectories) defined as the cultural trajectories that direct people toward ideal futures, some futures that convey the culture's values and norms. To illustrate the ways that underlying and tacit cultural assumptions prescribe institutional norms, Smagorinsky (2011) uses the term “channel” both as a noun (an act) or a verb (an action), as a natural or socially-constructed phenomena, and he points out that the goal, action and object of society is to acculturate people to societal ideals, objectives and norms. When I think of the *telos* of my school, it is channeling of students toward one social future at the exclusion of other possibilities (that often results in the performance or procedural display of learning). The *telos* might be that our purpose in the classroom is to prepare students for SATs and college résumés, regardless of whether the competition and pressure is good for all

students. Such a narrow *telos* does not allow for students who might imagine different social futures, and it ignores the students that have been relegated to the banks of this channel. Rather than one channel or one *telos*, we need many. And the unchecking of these societal assumptions allows for the reimagining of our purposes in designing literacy opportunities that widen the channel or create new channels. Smagorinsky (2011) warns,

Especially in English classes, the site of much literacy instruction, prolepsis works in service of the traditional culture of school... These cultural practices, facilitated by a limited toolkit of mediational means used to produce a small set of textual forms, restrict students in terms of the meaning available for them to construct. (p. 29)

For me, this idea of a channel that points students toward only one cultural trajectory, or *telos*, is one that underlies my need to continually reconsider how my classroom reinforces tacit expectations at the exclusion of other possibilities, and how my students comply with those expectations in forms of performance display rather than authentic engagement and agency. In other words, if I want to reconstruct my classroom, I need not only to think of the social practices sanctioned/encouraged in my classroom, but also to account for the ways that my students have been learning the rules of procedural display for eleven years in order to play the game of schooling and win the prize of college admissions and successful life, especially for students who still play the game even though they may have no hopes of winning in the conventional definition of success at the school.

Disrupting the Figured Worlds of Institutional Tracking and Labeling

For teachers striving to actively engage students of all levels, the hope for change falters just as much as the dim circle of light trapping me within its feeble glow. Tracking, socially constructed in inequitable structures of the past and reproduced in pedagogical activity of the present, sometimes seems too immutable a force for classrooms to undermine its impact on students' identities, activities, and social lives. I want to disrupt the "apprenticeship of

observation” that hinges on passive activity acculturated over time, but the challenge of often seems nearly insurmountable (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 80). But Urrietta (2007) calls for the potential of social worlds to engage in “negotiations of positionality” through which students may renegotiate any label that limits their self-making (p. 111) – in more permeable social spaces, students may challenge or reject institutional norms, they may accept discourses with a wink and a nod as a subtle form of subversion, they may improvise or originate positional identities. I would argue that classrooms may, as well, engage in these negotiations and subvert the limits to their self-making and the passive practices that predetermine our activity. Holland et al. (1998) call for improvisation that stands up to status quo ideologies and resists power structures, as a form of subversion and redirection at “the margins and interstices of collective cultural and social constructions” (p. 278). This notion of improvisation acknowledges that a teacher and her students may not be able to appreciably reshape the pedagogical world but may find spaces for reinventions at the margins of her classroom. It is the ethos of improvisation that strives for flickering glimpses of hope and change. Improvisation also emphasizes collective activity, agents in concert working to imagine new possibilities.

Dialogic Classrooms as Sites of Engagement, Inquiry and Authoring

To create a “space for authoring” as the improvisation of new identities and social worlds, Holland et al. (1998) call on Bakhtin’s dialogism that puts the self in dialogue with discourse of the present and past social worlds. It is through heteroglossic tensions arising from conflicting voices and perspectives that allow for a reframing of the status quo. Beach, Thein and Parks (2003) point to the potential that comes when teachers challenge unquestioned discourses and structures within their roles as the discussion facilitators. While students and the discourse community may align with majority or status quo ideologies (frequently white, middle-class

values and norms as in the social context of my school), teachers might model the potential of dialogic inquiry open to multiple perspectives and points of view:

Given tensions between these competing stances and discourses operating in a discussion, teachers attempt to mediate these tensions by supporting expressions of alternative, minority perspectives in what that serve to challenge status-quo perspectives...By inviting expression of alternative voices that challenge status quo discourses, teachers create a dialogic context that leads to further interrogation of the institutions constituting those discourses. (p. 8)

In this way, interrogation begets interrogation; teachers have the potential to improvise new forms of discourse by supporting marginalized voices in class discussion. For Beach, Parks and Thein's study of multicultural literature, inquiry of institutional structures through literature paves the way for inquiry of institutional structures in society, even the unacknowledged forms that privilege some students with expansive educational opportunity and disadvantages others with rote schooling. Bakhtin's practice of double-voicing is the potential of moving between divergent discourses, in this case moving between the discourse of high achievement associated with middle class backgrounds and the discourse of low achievement. Like students who resist acknowledging the benefits of white privilege, high-achieving students may find difficulty in acknowledging institutional privilege; they may cling to meritocratic notions that their high-status position in the school comes solely from their effort and ability. Likewise, students in lower-status tracks may have internalized a sense of inadequacy after years of being labeled in regular, remedial, failing or deficit terms. Double-voicing calls attention to the constructedness of these labels and permits students to acknowledge the institutional constructs that position them as either academically privileged or deficient. For Beach, Parks and Thein (2003), double-voicing through multicultural literature (such as Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*) allows students to see and understand "how individuals' identities and social practices are

constituted by their participation in institutional systems or social worlds” and to experience the impacts of these institutional structures (p. 3). Taking up alternative discourses through active discussion could aid students in recognizing the ways that institutions position students into high-achieving and low-achieving discourse patterns.

Dialogue and opportunities for open discussion, as well, communicate teachers’ recognition of all students’ voices as valued and powerful, a potential to level the institutional hierarchies at play in a single classroom (as in my co-taught classes where ability labeling ranges from gifted to special education). Applebee et al.’s (2003) quantitative study and Caughlan and Kelly’s (2004) coordinating qualitative study look at opportunities for meaningful discussion as shown by the degree of uptake and conversational turns between students that demonstrates the degree to which students have the opportunity to control the direction of discussion. These markers for meaningful discussion show the difference between perfunctory, I-R-E-centered discussion (Mehan, 1979) governed by teacher’s questions and evaluation, and authentic student-centered conversation. Caughlan and Kelly point to two factors that contribute to meaningful discussion: curricular coherence as the purposeful connection of instructional goals and activities but also cultural coherence based on Ladson-Billing’s culturally-relevant pedagogy (1994) as the understanding of students’ lives and needs. The purpose here is to show that effectively dialogic classrooms employ intertextuality (as cited in Fairclough, 1992) that places texts in conversation with each other and with students’ experiences and understandings. This curricular and cultural coherence “occurs where the teacher has a coherent model of the students’ past, present and future, both educationally and personally, and where she can see how the curriculum links to various aspects of the students’ academic and cultural life” (p. 29). This coherence where all the parts of classroom instruction work together in the students’ interests is what has the power to

destabilize tracked hierarchies. In absence of the coherence, we see classrooms centered on either rigorous academic exercises of analysis with no heart or culture or we see classrooms centered on all heart, all personal response (as in Rosenblatt's (1938) transactional reading) without the academic rigor that comes from high expectations for our students' futures. In their observations of Mrs. Vernon's honors and on-level classes, they noted a highly-coherent curriculum in honors centered on rich, student-led discussions with high degrees of uptake, personal introspection, social criticism, and academic rigor; while, her on-level class centered perfunctory teacher-centered discussions (following the I-R-E pattern) focused on superficial personal response as she expected no more from her students than what she called a love for reading. The differences in the forms of discussion (or lack of) expected in these dichotomous spaces speaks to the way that dialogue can serve to destabilize or to reinforce tracked hierarchies. The curricular and cultural coherence characteristic of high-ability classrooms holds much potential for calling into question the institutional norms that frequently deny that coherence to regular classes.

Recently, my students discussed the *This I Believe* essay "My Pal Robert" about a high school student waiting for a ride late at night outside the baseball stadium where she works. In selecting the essay, I had hoped to show models of voice and style as narrative writing approaches for students who would soon be writing their own essays. However, to my surprise, students in my most reticent class took to the subject with much vigor. The discussion started with a slow unfolding, first with the third of the class who regularly participate voicing what they appreciated (and did not appreciate) about the writer's style and subject, but then the discussion moved to the girl's fear of a homeless man – more and more students took to the subject weighing in on whether the girl was right or wrong to suspect that a homeless man could be a

threat. Students raised issues of people stereotyping those marginalized by society but also issues of women risking safety in a misogynistic world. As I helped moderate the discussion, I found myself surprised at the number of students speaking who typically do not, and surprised at the level of conflict that emerged over the girl's fear and her treatment of the homeless man: some students strongly arguing that the girl was justified in her assumptions, others arguing that the man has done nothing to deserve her suspicion. As the discussion wound down in the last few minutes of class, students who had vigorously debated only moments ago laughed at their heated interchange.

Thirty minutes longer than I had planned, the discussion, I realized, exemplified the potential of improvisatory dialogic practices to seek meaning through heteroglossic tensions and to situate the search for meaning in real-world issues authentic to students. Students weighed in on the human tendency for humans to judge others, the problems inherent in these judgements (stereotyping, unwarranted suspicion, race and class stereotyping) and also the reasons for suspicion (violence and misogyny against women). Two students in particular stood in conflict: a young man of Middle Eastern descent who vigorously argued that people should not be judged until they have done something to prove they are worthy of suspicion, and a young woman who identifies as gender-neutral who vehemently argued that women remain targets of rape and sexual assault in our society. What was most interesting about the interchange between the two students is the way their perspectives emerge from their life experiences and their perceptions of the social worlds around them. Fecho (2011) refers to the transformative power latent in heteroglossic dialogue as the space "to call all stances, including our own, into question... to explore them with a critical eye to then be better able to reject, accept, revise, or adapt a stance from an informed position" (p. 23). Despite the heated dialog in the room, students on both sides

presented well-elaborated and well-reasoned points. This almost accidental foray into dialogic practices guides the way I theorize interventions that will offer more possibilities for heated debate, where students can put their hearts and minds into exploring meaningful subjects.

In O'Donnell-Allen's (2011) pedagogical guide to introducing book talks centered on "tough texts," she argues for the potential of change that comes in giving students time to engage in discussion on topics important to their lives and understandings of the world they live in. Instruction starts with helping students learn the skills and purpose of civic discourse: tolerance for others' perspectives but also challenging others' ideas, and dealing with resulting conflict. With time to engage in conversation about culturally-relevant and controversial topics and space to practice the skills of civic discourse students begin to question status quo structures and hegemonies. O'Donnell-Allen poignantly argues, "All the social erosion we've seen in recent years—the blatant bigotry, polarized politics, and random violence in schools and communities—seems rooted in an unwillingness to consider other perspectives, listen well and speak peaceably, acknowledging complexity, and respectfully negotiate among varying viewpoints" (p. 147).

Countering Privilege, Resistance, Disengagement, and Passivity

In the ways that teachers design opportunities to examine and question typically unacknowledged institutional structures, there comes the potential to broaden the positional identities based on institutional discourses that cause students to pattern their response to school based on formulated ways of being. In shifting these norms, teachers can orient their classroom practices to seek complexity rather than didacticism and to counter rather than condone structures of inequity. Rex (2002) examines the role of a teacher's orienting discourse in the transition of general education students into a gifted classroom, and in particular, one student,

Kora, who gains academic competence and confidence through the teacher's inclusive orienting discourse, one that challenges the patterns of exclusion inherent in dichotomously tracked classrooms. Expressed explicitly (through official language such as the class motto) and/or conveyed implicitly through ongoing exchanges and practices, orienting discourses serve two functions: to maintain the teacher's expectations for what constitutes literate participation and to transition as students' performance developed to meet those expectations. The overlapping functions of *maintenance* and *transience* coalesce to provide a context of development.

According to Rex (2002),

When teaching and learning is observed as a gradual process of emergent social acts within an evolving culture of expectations, what is expected and accomplished is transient, and norms for performance evolve. Therefore, discourses of orientation provide recognizable principles for participation by which students act in response to unforeseen and ever-changing situations. Students' acts are recognizable as orienting actions when they are acknowledged, valued, and taken up by the collective. (p. 278-279)

For Kora, this environment governed by dichotomous orienting principles of high expectations moderated with developmental understanding permits her rapid growth beyond the passive forms of reading practiced in her past general education classes. Her early work in the higher-level class lacked the depth of analysis typical in an AP course; however, the teacher set the context for development, experimentation and divergence by encouraging the participation of all students (not just gifted ones), and students reaffirmed this attitude of transience in overlooking misreadings as Kora and other general education students became acculturated to the more rigorous literacy practices and the finer-grained analysis. What the blend of orienting discourse and developmental attitude indicates is the potential for change within the current structure of tracking; Kora's teacher still operates with the structures and discourses of tracking but finds space for individual students to progress and advance. In the developmental understanding

between teacher and students, there widens the scope of what counts as gifted or honors, managing to disrupt the label without structural change.

Thein, Beach, and Parks (2007) examine the problems that arise when teachers interested in making change through critical multicultural literacy meets resistance from students, often white and middle class who “do not want to be implicated in institutional or systemic racism” (p. 54). The study offers a reassuring compromise for teachers frustrated by the deep demands that critical literacy expects: the need to see a change in belief and in action. Thein, Beach, and Parks pragmatically note that these types of changes do not happen in the course of a class, but rather take years, but that an equally valid type of change can occur with a shift in our students’ “willingness to ‘try on’ different perspectives”:

Trying on alternative perspectives is a habit of mind that can help students acknowledge that other ways of understanding the world do exist and are worth considering or at least recognizing, even if they choose not to agree with those perspective... encountering tensions and trying on new perspectives, students experience changes that are often subtle, usually transitory, and frequently contradictory, that increase their understandings of how their beliefs and values are formed and why other people think differently. They therefore acquire the capacity itself to engage in and value perspective-taking through their literary experiences as a primary value for reading literature. (p. 55)

According to Thein, Beach, and Parks, perspective-taking opens the conversation about hegemonic practices without full upheaval of students’ belief systems:

We suggest that by encountering tensions and trying on new perspectives, students experience changes that are often subtle, usually transitory, and frequently contradictory, that increase their understandings of how their beliefs and values are formed and why other people think differently. They, therefore, acquire the capacity itself to engage in and value perspective-taking through their literary experiences as a primary value for reading literature. (p. 55)

In asking students to reconsider the ways that school either privileges or disadvantage their academic track, one might discover more resistance than willingness. However, the practice of perspective-taking means that students can attempt to see institutional norms and discourses

without ideological pressure to change their beliefs. In my school, students tend to come to class with very firm beliefs (many with conservative political and religious beliefs). In my experience, it is incredibly important to be clear with students that my agenda is only to bring into the classroom different perspectives, my agenda is not to change their belief systems. Being clear that I would like them to consider other perspectives but that I do not want to change their perspectives is crucial; without that caveat, the conversation can close before it even begins. The practices of perspective-taking, civic discourse and dialogic engagement all work to interrogate tacit norms in school and beyond, and to foster opportunities where students question the ways institutions position them into identities, activities and social worlds. The counter-hegemonic goal of attempting to introduce discussion practices that question the *telos*—the channeling of people towards implicit societal ideals, according to Smagorinsky (2011)—of our institutions is to start with awareness of that positioning that in turn proposes ways of defying it.

Community Building to Ease Lines of Demarcation

When students enter classrooms informed by institutional discourses and positioning, those discourses seem as well to mediate their interactions among peers, with students acting out interactions formulated by the accumulated experiences of ten years of tracked schooling. The divide between groups of peers seems to act as a barrier between any real sense of community in the classroom. These mediated interactions seem predicated on the tracked identities that schools establish through the labels we give students and students in turn reproduce as social hierarchies. In my regular and co-taught classes, I see a wide range of abilities from kids deemed gifted to those labeled special education, but it is not ability that I see so much influencing their activity in the class as the labels they act out. Ostensibly high-ability students who remain silent feel as if the class made up of special education students is beneath them; supposedly special education

students taking the lead in discussions and providing a powerful counter-narrative to the school's predominant norms of success and popularity; students standing neutral in the demarcation between high and low. Phelan, Davidson, and Cao (1994) point to the divide between groups of students that cross borders between social worlds and school worlds, but seldom do border-crossing students (typically academic high achievers) cross the border to interact with border-resisting students (typically academic low-achievers). It would seem almost as if these two groups of students dwelled in different worlds, even within the same classroom. Gilbert and Yerrick (2001) describe the microcultures of students alienated and resistant to discourses of achievement; however, I think these microcultures could also encompass students of every tracked level—with teens forming friend groups around the ways that school positions them. However, dialogic work allows for students to interrogate and perhaps even renegotiate those positionings. Dyson's (1993) work in a kindergarten/first grade classroom looks to "intersecting social worlds" (p. 4) for the potential of dialogic learning that promotes boundary-crossing moments, connecting overlapping spheres of activity, particularly for students from communities and cultural backgrounds that fall outside the middle-class norms associated with most schooling. In their day-to-day activities, students negotiate the interplay of the official sphere of the classroom comprised of curriculum and sanctioned literacies; the peer sphere made up of social alliances, disputes, affinities and interests; and the home sphere based on familial cultures, values, and linguistic registers. Though her work centers on negotiations between divides made up of cultural and socioeconomic differences, I think her work with border-crossing applies to crossing borders between the peer microcultures of tracked labeling in classrooms that bring these identities into interaction.

Dyson draws on the potential of permeable classrooms where teachers enact boundary-crossing as the social work that becomes identity work. When literacy practices become meaningful in the sense that students see the connection between their interests across all three spheres, activity in the classroom holds the potential of constructing narratives of identity and social interaction. According to Dyson, “when socially enacted, though, narratives not only communicate, but they also allow their authors to manipulate or regulate their own identities and those of others” (p. 58). Identity work through the construction of personal and social narratives could allow teens to consider social positioning, and to take agentive charge of the identity they internalize, project and perform. Dyson (1992) outlines three aspects necessary for the social negotiation of identity:

- Establish commonalities, or social cohesion with others
- Criticize others or defend themselves from others’ criticisms
- Take the stage, the interactional spotlight (p. 58)

Working in concert with dialogic discussions and perspective taking, this form of narrative construction relies on students coming to see themselves and each other more clearly through their recognition and acknowledgement of institutional positioning. Wells (1999) frames Vygotsky’s (1980) zone of proximal development as the work of dialogic development in terms of community interactions over individual ones. Dialogic engagement comes from what the social group develops collaboratively and leads to learning and development. Wells (1999) describes three criteria for reaching this collaborative learning – the task at hand must be something that the individual learner cannot achieve alone; these upper limits must be framed by the individual’s capabilities (neither too simple nor too difficult); the task must be relevant and purposeful to the learner. In terms of the identity work at hand—the renegotiation of identity and

social worlds to regain a sense of schooling unsullied by the dichotomies—would hopefully prove a task both meaningful and difficult as it would require students to call on their personal experiences of schooling, the sanctioned ideologies of meritocracy, the cultural and historical *telos* of our society.

Chapter Summary

The way that students interpret tracked labels says much about the way students interpret school as a whole. Students recognize the inequity of the system, even the high-track students who benefit from this inequity. The key to renegotiating or even outright rejecting these I-identities (Gee, 2000-2001) starts with acknowledging the historical and institutional discourses at play in forming identity. Teachers trying to mitigate the insidious impacts of tracking need students to understand the impact of tracking on their school experiences, and to question ways to renegotiate identities and reconstruct social worlds. Fecho and Botzakis (2007) refer to Bakhtin's metaphor of the carnival as a time of flattened hierarchies when both the peasantry and the elite engage in the merriment under the cover of costumes. The potential of carnivalesque dialogue comes in the easing of structured norms and the "realization that language and meaning are always in play and that each of us has something to contribute to that intellectual struggle" (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007, p. 551). The power of the dialogic is the potential I see to shift our perceptions about labels and engage in truth-seeking conversation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In his dialogue with Paulo Freire on the *Pedagogy of Liberation*, Ira Shor (1987) describes a teaching practice that starts with the sociocultural context – listening to his students, coming to know their backgrounds, their authentic voices and concerns. Shor calls these first moments with a new class “an experimental moment,” and further calls for recognition that

the first researcher, then, in the classroom is the teacher who investigates his or her students. This is the one basic task of the liberatory classroom, but by itself it is only preparatory because the research must animate students to study themselves, the course texts, and their own language and reality... Teaching like this can produce dissenting knowledge and alternative ways of using knowledge. (p. 6, 9-10)

Shor’s pedagogy inspires the potential of research as critical inquiry to open pathways for participation and empowerment in the classroom, of inquiry to shift classroom practices from rote standardization (that often sanctions official ways of knowing) that may alienate authenticity. Seeking change in the classroom motivates inquiry that recognizes classroom life as complex, as irreducible to simple variables. This complex nature of classroom life, Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer, and Schauble (2003) refer to as an ecology to represent the “interacting systems [that make up classroom life] rather than as either a collection of activities or a list of separate factors that influence learning” (p. 9). What the concept of an ecology makes clear is the teeming nature of social practices at play, which Barab and Squire (2004) describe as a “buzzing, blooming confusion of real-life settings where most learning actually occurs” (p. 4) Inquiry in the complex ecology of classroom life underlies the emergent framework of design-based research, which seeks to generate new understandings of learning through the intersections of practice and theory, local and global contexts for learning, intervention and observation. As a research practice, the iterative cycle – design, theory, intervention, analysis, reflection, redesign, repeat – grounds research in an ethos of transformation. Transformation that seeks

understandings of learning beyond first assumptions or conjectures, that designs and redesigns interventions in socially-situated learning ecologies, that looks beyond entrenched pedagogical practices for practical and theoretical innovations.

The roots of design-based research coincide with learning psychologist Ann Brown's (1992) paradigmatic move from the strict control of laboratory research to the complex chaos of *in situ* classroom research where she found a richer rather than reductive understanding of learning. Her work in empirical research controlled the context, reduced the variables of inquiry, and rendered simple the complex ecology of human learning. Her interest in the situated practices of reciprocal learning and responsive teaching resisted efforts to isolate variables as characteristic to quantitative and laboratory methodologies. Rather she finds a fuller understanding of socially-constructed learning after introducing an instructional intervention (jigsaw inquiry activities that promote reciprocal learning) through ethnographic methodologies. This approach suits the "synergistic" nature of classroom learning that defies the effort to isolated confounded variables. Within this line of inquiry comes a source of social change in its recognition of the richness of socially-situated learning, in the potential to recognize "students as designers of their own learning" (p. 150). Through her progression from lab to classroom, Brown describes the affordances of design-focused research as the potential to "transform classrooms from academic work factories to learning environments that encourage reflective practice among students, teachers and researchers" (p. 174). For teachers and researchers looking to effect pedagogical and social change, this ethos of innovation and empowerment stands at the center of the ways that design-based research could afford tools to better envision the rich ecologies of learning in authentic classroom settings.

Defining Design-Based Research

The emergence of design-based research starting with Brown (1992) and Collins (1990) brought some confusion and conflict in its early development in terms of its methodological orientation (Walker, 2011; Dede, 2004); research processes (Swartz et al., 2009; Ormel et al., 2012); researcher bias and usability (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; Barab & Squire, 2004; Shavelson, Phillips, Towne, & Feuer, 2003); and even the basic terminology (Reinking and Bradley, 2008; van den Akker, Gravemeijer, McKenney, & Nieveen, 2006; The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003); however, consensus from active scholarly debate has settled on some key motivations: to recognize the irreducible bridge between theory and practice, to engage in design-focused inquiry that generates practical innovations and theoretical understandings for how students learn, to situate research in authentic contexts in ways the recognize the complexity of teaching and learning (Brown, 1992; Collins, Joseph and Bielaczyc; 2004; van den Akker et al., 2006). This intersection of theory and practice underlies the way key scholars define design-based research:

A more systematic, intense, and data-driven way of doing what [practitioners] do every day: setting pedagogical goals, making instructional moves to accomplish those goals, determining what works or doesn't work in helping or hindering the achievement of those goals, making appropriate adjustments, and assessing and reflecting on what has been accomplished. (Reinking and Bradley, 2008, p. 3)

Design-based research is not so much an approach as it is a series of approaches, with the intent of producing new theories, artifacts, and practices that account for and potentially impact learning and teaching in naturalistic settings... researchers would systemically adjust various aspects of the designed context so that each adjustment served as a type of experimentation that allowed the researchers to test and generate theory in naturalistic contexts... (Barab & Squire, 2004, p. 2-3)

The potential of design-based research stems from its attempt to generate possibilities for educational progress that effect iterative change in the local context but as well provides

theoretical insight for applications beyond the local context. Collins, Joseph and Bielaczyc (2004) refer to this underlying ethos as one of “progressive refinement” – to place “a first version of a design into the world to see how it works. Then, the design is constantly revised based on experience, until all the bugs are worked out” (p. 19). The design process encompasses both theory and practice; the goal is to better understand the practices of learning and thinking in order to develop more expansive ontologies of what it means to learn. Refinements in design of the intervention lead to refinements in our ontologies of learning.

Key Characteristics in Implementing Design-Based Research

What differentiates design-based research from either quantitative or qualitative research is not the methodology but the mindset (Bereiter, 2002). Unlike (most) qualitative research, it seeks more than observation; it implements change in the educational context and typically employs ethnographic methods to observe the impact of the intervention on the classroom context (Barab and Squire, 2004). Unlike quantitative research, it seeks complexity in its intervention, recognizing the impossibility of isolating variables in the “messy situations of actual learning environments” (Collins, Joseph and Bielaczyc, 2004, p. 19). With a pragmatic approach that often mixes methods to best suit the researchers’ purpose of effecting educational change, the ethos of innovation guides research at each level of its emergent process.

Grounded in Theory, Situated in Practice, Generative of Theory

Design-based research establishes a closely reciprocal relationship between theory and practice seeks to narrow the distance between university researchers and school practitioners: practitioners seldom seek out theoretical research to ground pedagogy, and researchers infrequently collaborate with practitioners to make theory relevant to real classrooms (DiSessa and Cobb, 2004). The bidirectional flow of activity in design-based research starts with

researchers' "rigorous analysis of a learning problem" to ensure that the study's conception of learning starts from an ontological framework rather than a personal bias or an imaginative conjecture (Walker, 2006, p. 9). The second aim for this rigorous theoretical inquiry is to design and develop interventions that challenge and extend our theoretical understandings, interventions that improve learning within the local practice but lead to knowledge of learning that expands and improves our theoretical understandings of learning. Scholars call this generative quality, the ability and responsibility of design-based research to generate not only practice but also theory, as the vital purpose of design-based research (DiSessa and Cobb, 2004; The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003).

Barab and Squire (2004) argue that the measure of credibility for design-based research is not validity or trustworthiness but usability, the degree to which learning interventions and theory becomes usable to the field:

It is one thing to demonstrate learning gains or show that statistical differences have been achieved; it is quite another thing to demonstrate the usefulness or consequentiality of the work. With respect to design-based research, and learning sciences more generally, this consequentiality is an essential criterion for determining the significance of a particular study. Our goal, as applied researchers engaged in doing design work, is to directly impact practice while advancing theory that will be of use to others. (p. 8)

This ethos of usability means that the goal of research should lead toward innovation and ontology that benefit both theorists and practitioners. Beyond generalization, the mindset of design research is to posit theoretical and practical claims of innovation that other researchers and practitioners will continue to extend and refine in other learning contexts. Barab and Squire (2004) draw on Messick's (1992) concept of consequential validity to argue for a view of design research that looks to the impact of research on a social system. Messick's (1992) study on the potential of authenticity in performance-based assessments (in opposition to standardized, multiple-choice testing) argues for both evidential and consequential validity when researchers

and practitioners look to the results and consequences (particularly unintended consequences). For design researchers looking to promote innovation and change through research, the concept of usability and consequential validity keeps focus on the hope of finding change in the local context that will apply to the wider theoretical field.

Brown's (1992) move from the lab to classroom started with her need to understand real learning in the context of real learning to benefit real learning. She warned that research paradigms based on one-day laboratory experiments could not possibly account an accurate view of learning, as one could not expect to see change in a participant in such brief periods of time; rather she sought a "trade-off between experimental control and richness and reality" (Brown, 1992, p. 152). For researchers grounded in sociocultural beliefs, the local/global interaction of design-based research affirms development as socially-oriented in that it recognizes learning as a practice situated in complex environment or ecologies. According to Collins, Joseph and Bielaczyc (2004),

cognition is not a thing located within the individual thinker but is a process that is distributed across the knower, the environment in which knowing occurs, and the activity in which the learner participates. In other words, learning, cognition, knowing, and context are irreducibly co-constituted and cannot be treated as isolated entities or processes. (p. 1)

Further, Barab and Squire (2004) warn that the attempt to reductively isolate variables outside complex, local contexts as traditional research attempts to do leads to "impoverished contexts of participation [that] will necessarily lead to an incomplete understanding of their relevance in more naturalistic settings" (p. 1). The interconnected nature of theory and practice in design-based research strives for a fuller picture of learning, especially of socially-constructed learning. Local contexts, local practices serve as the medium for testing, innovating, expanding, and generating theory about learning situated in that community of practice.

Interventionist and Iterative

If the objective of design-based research is to generate theoretical understandings about learning situated in complex learning ecologies, the essential method is the design of interventions that promote emergent understandings. According to the Design-Based Research Collective (2003), “design of innovations enables us to create learning conditions that learning theory suggests are productive, but that are not commonly practiced or are not well understood” (p. 5). This interventionist stance works toward the design of learning possibilities that transcend the status quo, that imagine new possibilities for active and authentic learning.

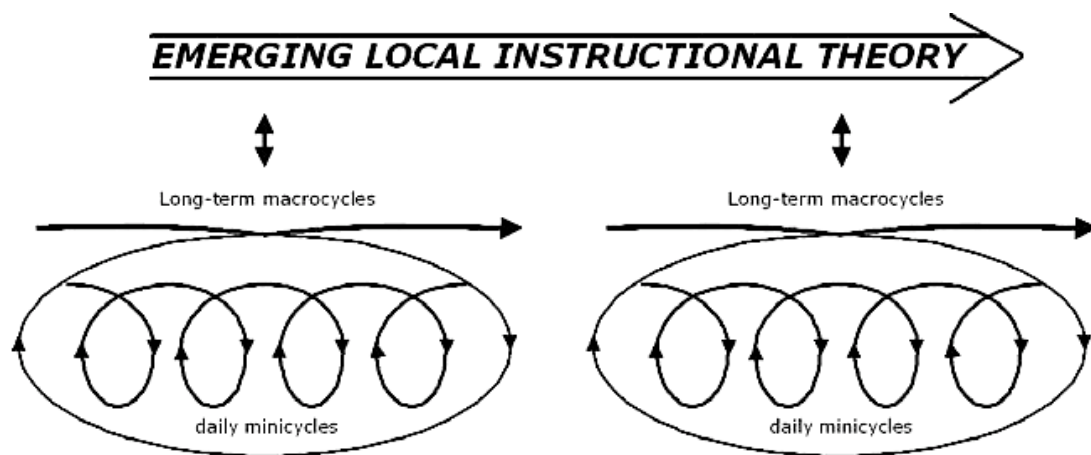
Scholars frequently equate the iterative intervention design process to engineering, as a blend of basic/theoretical and applied science. Neither theoretically pure nor contextually applied, the process of engineering innovation as well relies on a balance of conceptual ontologies in conversation with practical pedagogies. Cobb et al. (2003) describe the iterative design process as one of “‘engineering’ particular forms of learning and systematically studying those forms of learning within the context defined by the means of supporting them” (p. 9). The engineered intervention disrupts typical education patterns in order to propose innovations through an iterative design cycle and to observe their impact on learning.

Reinking and Bradley (2008) invoke the metaphor of engineering “as a testing ground for ideas for the application and development of theory within a systematic attempt to accomplish specific ends in real classrooms” (p. 9). The iterative process of engineering best explains the systematic process of designing an intervention based on theoretical constructs, testing it in within an authentic environment, observing its impact on learning in that environment, analyzing the impact based on theoretical understandings refining the design of the intervention, and

repeat. Gravemeijer and Cobb (2006) define three key phases to guide the iterative process, alternating between thought and action, intervention and analysis, design and revision:

- Phase one includes preparing for the intervention cycle by observing the local context and culture, clarifying the goals for learning in the local context, problematizing the affordances and constraints of learning practices within the local context and studying the theoretical basis for understanding the local context in terms of broader educational issues and ontologies.
- Phase two calls for implementing the design intervention and studying its impact through “microcycles of design and analysis” essential to the purpose of “conjecturing, enacting, and revising hypothetical learning trajectories” (p. 24, 25). Through this iterative cycle, researchers observe the learning of individual students in the daily occurrences of the intervention, make subtle design revisions to the intervention, and utilize an interpretive framework based on the study’s ontological grounding that aids researchers in interpreting the “complexity and messiness of classroom events” (p. 30). Microcycles of design and analysis guide day-to-day design of interventions with period macrocycles from a more retrospective analytical lens that permits oversight on pedagogical and methodological processes that ensure the study works toward its goals.

Figure 2. Gravemeijer and Cobb’s Model of Microcycles and Macrocycles



Adapted from Gravemeijer and Cobb (2006).

- Phase three concludes the study with systematic retrospective analysis of all data to verify assumptions and conjectures, validate data collection, and to eventually generate theoretical constructions about the local ecology and the wider educational context. Gravemeijer and Cobb describe a method of constant comparative analysis to retrace each iterative cycle to verify the study’s final conjectures against each iteration’s

conjectures: “this sequence of conjectures and refutations in effect becomes the data. It is while meta-analyzing these episode-specific conjectures, confirmations and refutations, that particular episodes reveal themselves to be pivotal” (p. 38).

“Pivotal moments” made visible from the analytic cycles serve the essential motive of design-based research; researchers first build learning theories from the microcycles (as a kind of local theory under construction) and then draw conjectures about how these pivotal moments might relate to issues beyond the local context.

To illustrate the reciprocal relationship between theory and design as conveyed by the metaphor of engineering, DiSessa and Cobb (2004) describe how airplane design depends on underlying concepts of physics and aerodynamics though that dependence may not directly manifest in the shape of the wing or selection of materials. However, failure to design with theory in mind may result in the worst types of flawed design, those that ignore “explanatory constructs that we use to understand phenomena” (p. 85). But the role of theory goes beyond conceptual construction, the goal of design-based research is to generate and regenerate theoretical innovations, to base new understandings of how people think and learn in new sociocultural contexts, making theory a living and breathing innovation and promoting the possibility for change in how we situate both our concepts of learning and the practices of learning. DiSessa and Cobb refer to the iterative and innovative process as “building the plane while flying it” (p. 98).

Because of the iterative design cycle in naturalistic and complex learning environments, interventions in design-based research differ foundationally and methodologically from those in empirical experimental research (controlled variables, random assignment, pre/post tests). For Reinking (2011), the potential of design-based research came to light, as in Ann Brown’s case, in the limitations of his work with quasi-experimental research; one study in particular led him to

problematize the laboratory metaphor for educational research. He describes, in an address to the Literacy Research Association, a failed study, failed because of the inability to control the experimental variables: the principal transferred struggling students into the experimental classroom (for remediation with an effective teacher), a teacher in the control classroom appropriated the experimental variable (a multimedia book review activity) to help her own students. According to Reinking's (2011) recollection of the study,

Both of these developments were sensible and in the best interest of students, but undermined our experiment... [One of the student researchers] said something that I will never forget. He commented that one reason for our failed project was that the teachers represented a nuisance variable... That experience revealed the extent and power of the laboratory metaphor [to represent experimental research] that put our work at odds not only with the reality of classrooms and schools, but, more importantly also with pedagogical decisions that served students. It disconnected us from the contexts in which we conducted our research and from the lives of those who we intended our work to inform. (p. 4)

The idea of research as laboratory requires researchers to fix the purpose of research without the potential for refinement and redesign that comes with the iterative cycles of design; it also forces researchers to maintain the gap between theory and practice, and to eliminate any potential for transformation that disrupts the research methodology.

Goal and Transformation Directed

At its essence, design-based research seeks change situated in interventions that address local learning problems; the iterative cycles center on goal-oriented processes that engineer solutions on the local level and the theoretical one. As well, the practice of research itself can promote a line of inquiry that can destabilize passive classroom practices. In Brown's (1992) study of reciprocal learning, authentic opportunities to collaborate through the designed intervention resulted in change in one part of the classroom that "reverberates" throughout the system, starting with "conceptual change in teachers as well as students, setting up a classroom

ethos that would foster self-reflective learning” (p. 143). Not only did the learning interventions promote positive change but so too can the research methodology itself, with its orientation toward intervention and innovation. Brown’s use of ethnographic methods also contributes to the classroom’s spirit of participatory culture. In improvisatory interview protocols, researchers probe students’ knowledge and tailor conversations based on students’ understandings. Brown observes higher degrees of concept-attainment, as the interview questions enabled students to reach greater degrees of appropriation through dialogue with researchers as more capable peers, illustrating Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development.

For sociocultural researchers, inquiry guides the potential to better understand the mediational means that govern student learning. However, Smagorinsky (2011) argues that the potential of this line of inquiry (though not addressing design-based research in particular) depends on an expanded notion of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development in that apprenticeship comes not from interaction with an adult or a more competent peer but from participation with the sociocultural context itself (with learning defined as a “tool-and-sign-mediated, cultural-historical process”) (p. 57). What this expanded ZPD means for research is that teachers, conscious of the potential of situating learning in wider teleological goals (or cultural aims), continually undergo a practice of inquiry that reconsiders the way classroom practices include and exclude tools, literacies and sources of expertise – that continually widen ZPD. Smagorinsky warns against reductive approaches for both teaching and research:

A teacher who demands that students use tools outside their cultural repertoires for tasks that do not build on their prior problem-solving experiences is not teaching, but assigning and testing... when there is little or no congruence between formal instruction and students’ prior culturally-fostered tool use, and when teachers make no effort to engage in a reciprocal relationship with students regarding appropriate tool use, instruction will fail. (p. 69)

What a sociocultural approach to design-based research can promote is this “reciprocal relationship” that continually seeks ways to expand the ecology of the classroom to include diverse rather than isolated ways of considering what counts as literacy and what counts as competence.

Brown & Campione (1996), as well, call for multiple zones of proximal development that “embodies a concept of readiness to learn that emphasizes upper, rather than lower, levels of competence, boundaries that are not immutable, but rather constantly changing as the learner becomes increasingly independent [through social interaction with the sociocultural context] at successively more advanced levels” (p. 236). The social culture of reciprocal learning (dialogue between students, between students and teacher, and even between students and researcher) pushes children toward the ever-expanding limits of their knowledge. The potential of design-based research comes in a methodology that attempts to push learning contexts towards developmental activity, the potential to open pathways for participation.

The Potential for Change in Design-Based Research

With its central character in designed interventions in local contexts, design-based research draws on pragmatic worldview in that it seeks practical solutions to real-world problems through methods that best address the research problem (Creswell, 2014). Pragmatism draws on the philosophy of American pragmatists of the early 20th century most notably William James and John Dewey. In particular, Dewey’s concept of reconstruction as a form of “rethinking and readjusting our principles and practices” matches the interventionist ethos of design-based research (Kadlec, 2006, p. 523). More central to design-based research’s interest in innovation (theoretical and practical), a current line of scholarship notes that pragmatism came to be popularized in forms that obscured its critical nature (Crotty, 2010). This critical pragmatism

stems from “Dewey’s emphasis on growth and social intelligence are grounded in a critical commitment to meaningful democracy” (Kadlec, 2006, p. 541). What critical pragmatism affords a design-based research study are dual purposes inherent in critical thought: critical in terms of inquiry that challenges hegemonic assumptions and critical in terms of change that promotes social equality.

Analytical purpose of change: to fully perceive the context and to envision interventions

The rigorous theoretical orientation in design-based research affords a type of analytic vision in the iterative design process that forces researchers to see “how to capture degrees of understanding, nuances of meaning, acceptable alternative viewpoints” (Brown, 1992, p. 147). Reinking (2011) cautions against the lens metaphor as a passive research stance; however, the analytic vision that comes from iterative cycles guides action and intervention. DiSessa and Cobb (2004) go on to describe the theoretical grounding as vision for analysis and action:

Not only do theoretical terms provide us with explanatory constructs that we use to understand phenomena, but they guide us in the tricky interventions necessary even to “see” theory-relevant things... Scientists in the process of developing theory somehow perform operations to see things that they are just beginning to conceptualize. (p. 85)

The analytic practice in many quantitative and qualitative research methodologies comes after data collection, but the iterative cycles of research means that analysis informs practice and intervention throughout the study. Theoretical constructs underlying the design process give vision to the researcher – to see how students engage learning within the school context but also to recognize how the school context points to bigger issues in our beliefs about schooling and to envision ways to empower our students in ways that transgress the constrictions of institutionalized schooling.

Cobb et al. (2003) propose two levels of analytical vision that guide the iterative and generative research process:

- Prospective analysis calls for hypothetical thinking that imagines possibilities for innovative learning practices in the design process. Cobb et al. (2003) refer to prospective thinking as opening “potential pathways for learning and development by capitalizing on contingencies that arise as the design unfolds” (p. 10).
- Reflective analysis seeks understandings and draws conclusions as the iterative process unfolds: “design experiments are conjecture-driven tests, often at several levels of analysis. The initial design is a conjecture about the means of supporting a particular form of learning that is to be tested” (Cobb et al., 2003, p. 10)

The recursive pattern between prospective and reflective analysis serves as the center of design-based research (in conjunction with Gravemeijer and Cobb’s (2006) micro and macrocycles).

Engineering theoretical and practical interventions, introducing these interventions in the learning context to observe the impact on learning, hypothesizing the causes and unintended consequences of the designed intervention. This pattern of vision – of seeing the potential and of problematizing that potential to better implement designs that solve problems in the immediate instructional context and the extended theoretical one.

The potential that sight might result in change requires what Bereiter (2002) calls “visionaries” to see beyond the restrictions of what is to the potential of what could be; Bereiter draws on Moore’s (1995) marketing theory of “early adopters” and “visionaries” to note two differing impulses in seeking change (as cited in Bereiter, 2002, p. 327). Early adopters seek what is new, always on the search for the trends, adopting one and then moving on; Bereiter cautions that early adopters should “be avoided whenever possible” (p. 327). Visionaries, conversely, seek sustainable change and imagine new possibilities:

Visionaries, as Moore describes them, are not dreamers. Rather, they are people who are attracted to an innovation because they see a way that it can help in achieving long-term goals of their own. Visionaries of this kind can spur the further development of innovations because they see potentialities that the originators of the innovation may not have seen. (p. 327)

This form of vision is focused, determined, purposeful; it works to innovate and to sustain. For design-based research, iterative cycles of analysis seek the understandings based in the local and the theoretical that enables visionary thinking.

Participatory purpose of change: to empower students and teachers through cycles of action and innovation

The aim of design-based research to enact reciprocal lines between theory and practice serves several foundational goals: to make research more relevant to practice, to complicate the empirical findings of research in real-world learning contexts; to build collaborative relationships between academics and practitioners (Reinking and Bradley, 2008; Ormel et al., 2012; The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003). The practice of engineering innovations in real-world learning contexts means that practitioners, as well as researchers, join in the spirit of visionary thinking. Bereiter (2012) notes that teachers as participants can become much more than willing informants; teachers can contribute to the visionary and innovative thinking. Students, too, benefit from the innovative spirit of visionary design practices that seek more authentic ways of learning. In two highly foundational studies (as cited by Collins, Joseph, & Bielaczyc, 2004), Brown and Campione's (1994) designed intervention for fostering a community of learners opens pathways to participation in biology education; and Joseph's (2004) designed intervention for a passion school fosters student interest and engagement in school learning through interest-driven practices. What each of these important studies makes clear is the potential of the design cycle to shift the purpose of learning in the local setting through opportunities for students to guide their own learning, to apprentice learning within self-selected.

In Brown and Campione's (1994) community of learning, the iterative cycle found early resistance to student-centered learning. Before students acclimated to reciprocal learning, early

iterations of the practice resulted in limited success with students engaging only in shallow and perfunctory discussion, based on information gained from a single text and recited fairly didactically. After the first phase of intervention, the researchers, in collaboration with practitioners, reoriented the design and goals around the abilities of diverse learners and the norms of a community of learners. These goals made more permeable the bounds of what counts as academic knowledge and what counts as ways to participate. As students took responsibility and ownership for their own learning, they selected texts for study and ways to demonstrate their expertise and understanding (Brown, 1992; Brown & Campione, 1994; from personal communication with Brown & Campione as cited in Collins, Joseph, & Bielaczyc, 2004). The iterative cycle of design-based research itself contributes to the shift from passive to active learning – the ability to continue cycles of innovation fosters an ethos of active participation that move students into a stance of self-guided discovery.

Joseph's (2004) passion school sought to foster interest-driven groups in an after-school program that would ignite student's motivation and "make effective use of learner goals to lead to learning on adult terms" (p. 237). Like Brown and Campione's (1994) study, the first iterative cycle stumbled in its implementation when students resisted the designed curriculum itself: the passion school selected a theme of flight to give community and cohesion among student projects. However, students nearly unanimously found the theme disengaging and inauthentic. The curriculum failed to foster the authentic forms of student-centered learning. Back to the design phase, Joseph engaged in a line of theoretical inquiry about motivation to determine ways for students to engage with the theme in authentic ways, finding several paths of possibility to explain the failures of the first iterative cycle. Here, she sought theoretical understandings to solve the local problem, but she also looked to the local context for solutions, observing students

to better understand their interests and to design around their interests for a second iterative cycle of video crew based on actual student interests. At this second cycle, the study begins to rely on what Barab and Squire (2004) call “flexible design revision in which there is a tentative initial set that are revised depending on their success in practice” (p. 4). This flexibility serves the goals of participation and empowerment in that the designed intervention centers on the needs of particular students and particular teachers. Three students serve as case studies for understanding their negotiated motivational practices when they self-selected projects and when they were recruited or assigned projects. Charles, a student with high degrees of capability on self-selected projects but resistance on projects to which he was either recruited or assigned, reveals the potential of designing around the passions and interests of students that allow students to engage in self-directed learning without outside structures that restrict their choice (Joseph, 2004; Collins, Joseph, & Bielaczyc, 2004). Joseph’s use of design-based research indicates the potential of engaging in both theoretical and observational lines of inquiry between iterative cycles. If researchers value participation that opens classrooms wide to students’ passions, the cycles of design must center on ethnographic observation – much like Shor’s pedagogical practice of apprenticing himself to his students’ backgrounds – to understand the culture of students both inside and outside the classroom.

Brown (1992) refers to “inert knowledge” and “passive learning” as the “diseases of schooling” (p. 143), and uses the potential of design-based research to design and redesign in ways that shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered ecologies. The potential of design-based researchers can also move teachers from passive to active roles, abandoning fixed and formulaic lesson plans for innovative solutions based on the needs of students in the local context and grounded in theoretical conceptions of what forms of learning will serve their needs:

“teachers are no longer managers and didactic teachers, but models of active learning and guides to aid the students learning” (Brown, Ash, Rutherford, Nakagawa, Gordon, & Campione, 1993, p. 203). Paradoxically, teachers take on a more active role of invention and innovation, as they move from the deliverer of learning to the designer of learning opportunities.

A central ethos of design-based research is the emergent lines of collaboration between academics and practitioners that empowers teachers to become designers and inventors. In this way, teaching and researching with design in mind takes on the character of *bricolage*, the concept coined by Lévi-Strauss (1966) as a type of intellectual tinkering and reinvention from the accumulated resources at hand. The *bricoleur* operates as a sort of jack-of-all-trades on the bounds of society. The importance of use and reuse characterizes the act of bricolage, and relates to Gravemeijer and Cobb’s discussion of design-based research as “theory-guided bricolage,” one that adapts and repurposes concepts to serve new purposes. However, bricolage need not stop with researchers; the real potential of the collaboration between research and practice is when teachers become bricoleurs. The teacher as bricoleur adapts and redesigns curriculum in a way that puts abilities and needs of students in contact with redesigned alternatives (Reilly, 2009). According to Collins, Joseph, & Bielaczyc (2004), “Educators need to create environments where students are not afraid to put forth new ideas, share what they learn, and produce products they can show to the world” (p. 18). Designs nurtures design, as teachers create a participatory culture that allows students to design their own learning goals and outcomes; so too do students become bricoleurs. This potential for empowerment speaks to Brown’s notion that change in one part of the classroom “reverberates” through all parts.

Methodological purpose of change: to conduct research that illuminates complex learning environments with the goal of intervention and innovation

The pragmatic worldview orients design-based research towards use and application; which also means that its implementation remains open to many methods – quantitative, qualitative or more frequently mixed methods (Ormel et al., 2012; van den Akker et al., 2006). However, the purpose of generating useful designs also means that ethnographic methods comprised of observation, interviews, and thick description can most effectively collect the details of intervention and appropriation (or lack of appropriation) (Barab & Squire, 2004). Granular level understandings through ethnographic methods give a fuller, richer understanding of the educational context – the complex social interactions (or lack thereof) that result from iterative cycles of intervention (Brown, 1992).

In DiSessa and Cobb's (2004) study of sociomathematical reasoning, their close observation of the classroom context embraced the messiness of real learning after noticing a "surprising occurrence" that reoriented their goals and interventions to follow the patterns of engagement and participation in the learning community. The researchers argue, "failures or surprising successes not infrequently push toward, and sometimes enable, new lines of inquiry, possibly involving new ontologies" (p. 87). Responsive in orientation, the ethnographic methods follow the participants' reaction to the designed intervention, which contributes to the authenticity of design-based research. Just as Reinking (2011) refers to engineering as a verb to recognize the action of designing interventions for a living, breathing context, Street (1993) refers to culture as a verb to the construction of meaning through the practices of culture and to represent the power of ethnography to recognize what individuals and groups do with culture, not just what they are. But design-based research using ethnographic methods also situates the research practice as action-oriented intervention rather than passive observation.

In moving from the tight control of the laboratory to the chaotic complexity of the classroom, Brown (1992) advocates the potential of ethnographic observation to result in meaningful change in participants' sense of agency and empowerment. However, Brown refutes criticism that her findings on agency stem from the Hawthorne Effect, the problem of the research process unduly influencing the local context and causing change. This effect refers to 1920s research study of working conditions (both physical and psychological) and productivity in a General Electric plant; the researchers ultimately concluded that the research study itself prompted the increases in productivity. However, in revisiting the original study, Brown noted that changes in working conditions resulted in three key shifts in the way workers perceived the workplace and perceived their own sense of agency in the workplace:

- (a) Workers *perceived* there to be improvements in the conditions being manipulated, whether or not this was so; (b) workers *perceived* the change to be in their interest; and (c) workers *perceived* that they were in control of their own conditions of work. (p. 165, emphasis in original)

Brown (1992) goes on to argue that “the Hawthorne effect is exactly what I am looking for in my classroom;” that is to say that the research process itself can become the catalyst for change, for change from inert to active, not just in perceptions of agency but in actual agency. The shifts enacted by the methodological process helped to destabilize entrenched patterns of teacher-centered, didactic pedagogies, which may result in learners taking power within the context of the research-rich learning context.

Systemic purpose of change: to challenge institutional status quos through innovation

The emergence of design-based research with its focus on complex understandings of authentic learning ecologies seeks to move past research that reinforces single-variable studies with reductive conceptions of learning. Collins, Joseph and Bielaczyc (2004) argue that the “narrow measures” associated with empirical and laboratory research reduce the complexity of

learning to “bottom line” measures associated with achievement, skills and fixed knowledge. Pre/post test methodologies reveal a narrow understanding of single variables, often-singular test-based skills. Complexity associated with the multivariable understandings that come with design research encourage researchers to see the wider scene to consider the types of abilities that employers in the modern market may value rather than fixed and inflexible knowledge:

They care whether potential employees show up on time, take responsibility for getting a job done, work well with *others*, put in their best effort to succeed, and so forth. They would probably regard a school that instilled these virtues as much more valuable than a school that simply instilled a lot of specific knowledge. A similar argument can be made that these dispositions are key to success in college and any other endeavor that students are likely to undertake. (p. 18)

The frequency of design-based research studies grounded in sociocultural ways of learning look beyond. We might hope for studies that go beyond workplace competencies, as argued by Collins, Joseph and Bielaczyc (2004). However, design-based research with its affordances of complexity, authenticity and innovation yields great potential to observe and intervene in endemic challenges in the culture of schooling.

However, Bereiter (2002) argues that the economics of education institute an environment predicated on efficiency and productivity, and that these motives inhibit the potential for long-term, radical innovation that challenges the status quo. Bereiter (2002) traces the history of innovation (or lack thereof) and points out that an adapted (read status quo) design becomes entrenched despite flaws in its function; analogous to the lack of innovation in education is the entrenched and deficient design of the combustible engine. The piston engine with its design that results in loss of energy and momentum resists “radical innovation” despite the design flaws, rather the entrenched design undergoes refinement that mitigates the most problematic issues but maintains and stabilizes the essential (flawed) design. Countervailing designs (Bereiter gives the example of the Wankel rotary engine) that solve the shortcomings of

the entrenched design fail to destabilize the status quo. Despite the Wankel engine's promise and theoretical affordances (a rotary design that maintains momentum and saves energy), it failed to initially outperform the entrenched design of the piston engine. According to Bereiter:

The failure of the Wankel engine *cannot* be explained separately from the success of the conventional engine. For if the Wankel engine had been competing with the piston engine of 1910, it might likely have won out. Instead it was competing against the piston engine of 1970, which by then had become a very refined product... *The point is that a flawed idea, if continually refined, can win out over a better idea that has not had the benefit of as much development.* (p. 322)

For Bereiter, the threat to innovation (as analogous to the piston engine) is the reductive means of empirical research that continues to refine the educational machine but not to reinvent it. These quantitative means can fail to challenge the endemic problems of standardized testing, skill-based instruction and passive learning environments. Bereiter (2002) points to the potential of design research to propose alternatives to entrenched educational norms in the form of radical and sustained innovation: "Design research is guided by some vision of as-yet-unrealized possibilities and is characterized by emergent goals...the best design research has a visionary quality that cannot be derived from these other kinds of research" (p. 326).

Cautions, Challenges, and Controversies

The emergence of design-based research over the past two decades presents several challenges for researchers, particularly novice researchers. Dede (2004) argues that the field's lack of cohesion in methodological frameworks means that some design-based research studies, particularly dissertation studies, lack the theoretical rigor required for the "ontological innovation" that DiSessa and Cobb (2004) deem requisite to the method's purpose. The source of the problem in these "underconceptualized and over-methodologized" studies, according to Dede (2004), stems from the field's deliberate lack of control in both the conception and the perception of designed-based research; he calls attention to the open-ended "whatever works" study design

as suiting the subjective pragmatism in the field, in that its emphasis on local contexts eschews objective epistemologies that afford consensus. However, the lack of a standard methodological framework prompts skepticism from the broader research community and permits development of faulty studies that design with the end in mind, with a “predetermined ‘solution’ and seek educational problems to which it can be applied” (p. 107). To sustain the iterative and emergent purpose of developing concepts rather than testing them, novice researchers must look to an orienting framework that manages the tendency to fixate on premature solutions before the iterative cycle unfolds. But the search for an orienting framework may itself prove disorienting: Bradley and Reinking (2008) alone outline seven different frameworks. For novice researchers seeking the potential of design-based research to innovate beyond established theories and methodologies, the pragmatic approach of selecting a methodological framework starts with the local context, the need to understand how real problems impacts students in an authentic context. Walker (2006) calls for a balance between “boldness and caution” to ground this pragmatism:

Concentrate on the most *important* design problems, understand them thoroughly, identify the most promising features for the design in light of that understanding, build prototypes with these features, and try them out. (p. 11)

Embracing this pragmatism as contingent fosters the potential of design-based research as a “context of discovery” rather than a “context of verification” (Schickore and Steinle 2002, as cited in Kelly, 2006, p. 114).

A second challenge inherent in design-based research stems from the intense data collection process of the iterative and long-term ethnographic methods, which results in both practical and ethical concerns (Collins, Joseph, and Bielaczyc, 2004). To engage in progressive and retrospective forms of analysis (Gravemeijer and Cobb, 2006), researchers must collect micro-grained observations and interviews (ideally in video and audio) at each iterative

intervention. Retrospective analysis establishes validity in its methodical attention that checks the researchers' findings from progressive analysis against the entire project, checks assumptions through confirming and disconfirming occurrences, and works to place the findings into a broader theoretical context. The rigor of this process fosters and documents ethical inquiry; however, these vast stores of data prove daunting for collection and formidable for this fine-grained analysis. Here, too, Walker (2006) balance between "boldness and caution" guides researchers to design studies large enough for the intervention take hold in meaningful ways but not so large that the data collection process proves prohibitive to the study's goals.

Brown (1992) calls attention to selection bias or the Bartlett effect, that may result when researchers working with vast pools of data select segments of data that prove the researchers' theoretical conjecture but that do not represent the full picture of interaction in the classroom. In particular, selection bias can lead to victory narratives that portray the intervention only in terms of its successes. This type of analysis disserves the intention of design-based research to situate theory in the complex ecology of real learning and it disserves the students in that ecology. To maintain her focus on the big picture of the classroom, Brown (1992) engaged in participatory structures to aid in data selection:

To make my task more *manageable*, I now have observers, ethnographers, teachers and even children indicating in their field notes when an interesting interaction occurs, so that we can transcribe "just those events of interest." This is, of course, selection before selection. But it is a nontrivial task to capture the rich social and intellectual life of a classroom with a level of analysis that would permit one to look at real conceptual change taking place over time. (p. 163)

This notion of participation seems to go beyond member-checking in that participants contribute their perspectives to the shaping of research, not just the verification of suppositions but the construction of meaning.

Chapter Summary

Empowering students to engage in the inquiry at hand builds the collaborative structures inherent in design-based research, participation that works toward authentic activity, pedagogical change, and theoretical innovation. Grounding ethical measures in Brown's ethos of an ecological view of classroom life becomes the measure by which this novice research will attempt to design a study and an intervention that captures the authenticity of students negotiating the social practices of my classroom. Paradoxically, this ethos seems (to me) to have more ethical grounding in its goals of authenticity than the conventional measures of validity, reliability and trustworthiness. No doubt, design-based research offers opportunities to misrepresent data and to short-circuit its goals of emergent understandings, but the emphasis on "buzzing, blooming confusion of real-life settings" as the overarching ethical paradigm means that teachers and researchers cannot misrepresent that confusion, no matter how it buzzes or blooms, or resists either buzzing or blooming (Barab and Squire, 2004, p. 4). The iterative cycle of design and redesign seeks intervention that results in growth, but also finds promising ways of conceiving change in the successes *and* the failures. To do otherwise would be to deny the living ecologies of our classrooms.

Chapter 4: Methods

For a teacher seeking to change the status quo in her classroom, design-based research is an act of optimism more than anything. It is the process of thinking through the problems confronting her students, grappling with the theory of learning, and devising inventive ways to counter what limits her students' engagement and growth. Part of the problem with teaching is that pessimism attempts to overtake optimism at every turn. Too little time, too many mandates, too much overwhelming need. But the ethos of a designer is the hope to innovate and improve, to face problems without trepidation. In the middle of planning the design of this study, I learned that a student I taught only a year ago committed suicide. He was a quiet student, a good student, one that turned in his assignments on time, that rarely contributed to class discussion, that only tepidly smiled when I spoke with him before class, a young man who rarely yielded any personal details about his life or his thinking. In the hours and days after I learned of his suicide, I thought of the ways that my classroom failed to be what he needed, of the ways that academic rigor competes with and overtakes what I hope is the real purpose of literacy education, the exploration and growth of our humanity. As I stood at his graveside with snow falling on the hundreds of students gathered in somber silence, and as I watched my former students carry his coffin, too heavy a burden for high school seniors just eighteen years old, I felt the enormity of our responsibility as teachers. How can we reimagine our classrooms as spaces that permit authenticity and understanding, as places where students can find reprieve from the unyielding pressures of school? In the weeks following his funeral, I continued to design my way past pessimism and towards a tempered optimism, and I continued to think of my student, in the hopes that I can encourage a classroom that will help students find solace from the terrible trials of being a teen in America today.

Reorienting Classroom Spaces for Dialogic Engagement

When I stand back and look at my classroom and think of what I hope to accomplish, I see that the effort I started over two years ago to reposition my classroom as authorial (a student-centered space for knowledge-construction) rather than authoritarian (a teacher-centered space for knowledge-transmission) has shown some promise (Matusov, 2011; Dysthe, 2011) – more students participating in discussion, longer responses, some uptake from student to student. But when I think of the students who remain silent and silenced in the classroom, I still question the way that the practices in my classroom and the longer practices of eleven years of public schooling speak more to procedural displays of engagement (Bloome, Puro and Theodorou, 1989) rather than substantive engagement (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1990). Students following the pedagogical pattern set out from elementary school go through days on end in “lifeless but orderly classrooms” agreed upon by a “‘treaty’ in which low academic demands are treaded for good behavior” (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1990, p. 3, 2); teachers and students work in cooperation to “get through the lesson” that offer the appearance of learning but perhaps not the actuality of it (Bloome, Puro and Theodorou, 1989, p. 282).

In the design of this study, I look for ways to question what often goes unquestioned at school in order to build more opportunities for substantive engagement. If we question the ways that the cultural trajectory of school centers on GPA and SAT scores, what happens to student agency and engagement when we (in a shared social practice of dialogue) start to look at how the structures of schooling impact identity construction? Will students become more substantively engaged when they resist institutional identities and labels? Will they take more agency in their education (at least in one classroom) when they study models of identity and agency and then apply those models to coming-of-age literature and to their own lives? In designing the activities

and interventions in this study, I look to the potential of dialogic literacy practices for ways to reshape my teaching practices and the classroom's literacy practices to foster substantive rather than procedural engagement:

- Students as sources, generators and constructors of knowledge rather than receivers
- Purpose of literacy is to explore and grapple with complex ideas rather than to recite facts
- Texts (print and non-print) treated as “thinking devices” rather than information sources
- Dialogue to respond and co-construct knowledge and interpretational frameworks
- Teacher's role is to provoke, respond, and reciprocate to students' role (with observations and probing questions), rather than to evaluate for correctness
- Knowledge is contingent, tentative, and emergent rather than fixed and objective
- Classroom sanctions difficult topics and embraces conflict as understanding emerges through heteroglossia (the voicing of multiple points of view)
- Discussion is cohesive and elaborated rather than choppy and brief, as the purpose is to find meaning rather than to verify facts. (Nystrand, 1997)
- Agency-oriented in that students take ownership of the purpose of learning
- Discussion and instruction allows for creative improvisation and opportunistic tangents rather than pre-scripted and prescribed programs (Matusov, 2011)
- Curriculum connects to students' personal and affective interests
- Classrooms spaces oriented towards openness and trust rather than competition (this is not to say that there is no confrontation or conflict as heteroglossia relies on ideological conflict)
- Ontological rather than epistemological in orientation (Dysthe, 2011)
- Classrooms spaces that flatten hierarchies and reject the status quo (Lensmire, 2011)
- Change and transformation-oriented as the purpose of dialogic inquiry is to discover new ways of thinking, learning and being (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007)

The underlying principle that makes dialogic engagement possible is an emphasis on student-authored inquiry, on subjects, problems, texts, and conversations crucial to students' emerging understandings of the world. Nystrand (1997) argues, “Depth of understanding requires elaboration of the learner's, not the teacher's, interpretive framework, and it is the important

purpose of dialogic instruction to promote just such development” (p. 20). Empowering students to critique institutional discourses that underlie the paradox in Matusov’s rule seven in which students must “actively desire” the very school practices that either drive relentless competition or prompt resistant passivity.

The iterative design process for studying the complex ecologies of classroom life (Barab & Squire, 2004) seems particularly well-suited to considering how dialogic literacy practices could foster substantive engagement through which students questions the ways that school positions them, and test new ways of being and learning eased from the performance of procedural display. The responsive nature of design-based research – introducing interventions, observing the response, modifying the intervention – speaks to the improvisatory nature of dialogic pedagogies. Matsuov (2011), pointing out the way that prescribed pedagogies limit students’ agentic participation, concludes,

Education is understood as joining a human culture through constant creative transcending this preexisting human culture.... The notions of active and creative participation in, and contribution to, culture-in-making contrast with traditional notions of reproduction, transmission and discover of ready-made culture because the former notions are *agency-based* and the latter notions are essentially *agencyless*. (p. 27)

In this study, I will look to the practices of dialogic pedagogy to design interventions that go beyond the ready-made culture of school and improvise space where students can take agency to remake new classroom cultures. Drawing on Gravemeijer and Cobb’s (2006) three phases of methodological design that alternate with stances of thought and action, intervention and analysis, design and revision, I orient the design process in both theoretical understandings of literacy and observations of the local context.

Research Design Phase 1: Conceptualizing Cycles of Intervention

The first phase of design bases design goals on observation of the local context, grounded in theory. Gravemeijer and Cobb (2006) situate the conceptualization process on balancing “ending points” as the intended goals of the intervention with “starting points” as the observations of learning not only in the present also “the consequences of earlier instruction” (p. 20, 21). Observation with the purpose of understanding how eleven years of schooling culminate in the responses and behaviors students exhibit in the present helps to illuminate the way students learn the performance of procedural display over their histories in school.

Taking stock of the starting point in my classroom, I see the many ways that students have learned how to perform their parts in an ostensibly high-achieving high school. For many students, the game they play is grades – counting every point, wanting know what category in the gradebook the assignment will go into before they even do the assignment, consulting the online gradebook like a crystal ball that can tell their future. Assignments seem to mediate their engagement with school, and determine their participation. For other students, grades still hold much sway over their behavior but seems to fix their disengagement into a pattern of noncompliance, of nonparticipation. I see a class divided between participants and nonparticipants. Discussion *can be* energetic, free-flowing, thought-provoking, but in any given period, only a third of the students participate without being called on. Many students remain silent, disengaged, and passive – some may listen, but many tune out. In discussions where students do speak from their experiences, encounter tensions between divergent perspectives, I see the potential of dialogic activity to guide the way I theorize interventions that will offer more possibilities for more students to voice meaningful dialogue.

Orienting Goals Based on Research Questions

As I devised the design for this study, I kept the research goals and questions with which I started the study forefront in the plan for instruction interventions and data collection:

- How do labels influence the [lack of] opportunities that teachers enact for dialogic inquiry, and how do labels influence students' [un]willingness to engage in dialogic inquiry?
- How do students act on identities inferred from these labels? How do labels impact students' attitudes towards school and the identities they exert in school?
- How can dialogic literacy practices help in destabilizing tracked labels and renegotiating identities for more participatory classrooms?

Looking to dialogic and sociocultural theory for understandings of how to enact authorial spaces that afford opportunities for substantive engagement and transgress the labels that tend to promote procedural display, I devised the following four pedagogical goals to orient the literacy activities in each cycle of intervention:

- Sanction **student-centered literacies and competencies** and make connections between the social worlds in school and those outside of school – recognize the ways that students build identities and competencies outside the classroom and schoolhouse in ways, and challenge the ways that schooling excludes these forms of being and ways of knowing. Draw on students' knowledge with more permeable lines between school and life. (Dysthe, 2011; Moje, 2006; Beach, Johnston, & Thein, 2015)
- Emphasize **critical literacy skills** that position reading, dialogue, and writing as the potential to challenge status quo assumptions about identities and identity construction. Drawing on Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, Fecho (2011) points to inquiry and critique as corresponding stances that lead not to destruction but to construction of meaning: "if to inquire is to ask with sincerity, then to critique is to question with doubt" (p. 23). In dialogic spaces, students with differing perspectives on issues of power, privilege and oppression bring into negotiation authoritative and internally persuasive discourses; it is in the opening of dialogue rather than the closing of it that lies the potential for widened perspectives. Fecho (2011) recalls a classroom experience when a student referred to Juliet as a slut not deserving of Romeo's love; Fecho later came to regret that he intervened and censored the comment as it had driven the banished ideas "underground where they wouldn't be turned over, examined, and perhaps, reconsidered" (p. 24). In a

dialogic space that goes beyond basic comprehension and analysis that reify canned answers, the skills of reading and writing become the starting point rather than the stopping point. Open to inquiry and critique, dialogic classrooms position learning as understanding the world in fuller and more complex ways (Aukerman, 2012; Beach, Johnston, & Thein, 2015; Bean, 2011).

- Practice **perspective-taking for alternative stances** on beliefs, understandings, and readings to develop what Beach, Johnston, and Thein (2015) refer to as “an ability to live in the gray area [that] is a mark of maturity, humility, and wisdom” (p. 80). For students in particularly homogenous social worlds, the ability to see beyond their familiar bubbles and to recognize the perspectives of those from divergent social worlds may prove particularly difficult because students may resist multicultural texts or critical theories in fear of being connected to discourses of racism and prejudice. However, the practice of perspective-taking enacts the ability to recognize the validity of other belief systems by reading through the lens of differing cultural backgrounds and life experiences even if one does not appreciably change one’s thinking or beliefs. According to Thein, Beach, and Parks (2007), “students develop perspective-taking as a habit of mind through which they acknowledge, respect, understand, and possibly still disagree with alternative perspectives. While this kind of change begins in subtle, transitory forms, we argue that in looking at the state of our world today, this is the kind of change that might truly be transformative” (p. 59).
- Inspire **free-ranging, carnivalesque and substantive engagement through dialogic inquiry** with texts (print and non-print), with peers, and with self. In spaces free from the constrictions of prescribed schooling (much like the way carnival brings reprieve from the boredom, struggles and hierarchies of regular life, students transact with texts and peers in meaningful ways. Fecho & Botzakis (2007) suggest that spaces where knowledge is emergent and transformative look more like playgrounds that animate literacy as affective transactions and enthusiastic response than museums that preserve it as analytic study. In dialogue that permits active inquiry and critique, agents enter a state of “wobble,” a state where one questions the static status quos and where one begins to see new courses of action by making the familiar strange. Fecho (2011) notes,

The idea is not to destroy the pillars of someone’s belief systems and send it crashing to the ground. That only results in anger and defiance. Rather, the intent is to get those pillars to sway enough that the wobble grabs the person’s attention and compels some level of reflection on the contexts that created that belief system. (p. 54)

In dialogic spaces made “safe” for inquiry and uncertainty, the disorientation and discomfort that comes with shifting perspectives might bring a revelatory freedom to

explore. For our students who spends so much of their class day trying to prove their knowledge, to guess what the teacher is asking so as to provide the exactly right answer, the freedom to wobble – to be unsure and exploratory – might be to reenvision learning as an active process rather than a prescribed product.

These orienting goals inform the development of interventions and also guide qualitative analysis for the degree to which interventions result in engagement in the classroom and agency in the classroom and hopefully beyond. More important for me as a teacher-researcher, these goals and the literacy activities inherent in each goal define measures by which I can evaluate my teaching through the design of the interventions. Design-based research shared with action research a purpose of continual evaluation to improve pedagogy, and the lives of students in our classrooms. For me, I will use the cycles of intervention to evaluate the authenticity of discussion practices – the hope for dialogue rather than recitation (Nystrand, 1996); the use of authentic questions, observations and uptake rather than the IRE pattern; students authoring and moderating their own discussions with little interference from the teacher (Gutierrez, 1991).

Setting and Participants

The site of the study is the school where I teach juniors in American Literature. A large suburban high school, Pruitt High School typically ranks as the third highest achieving high school in the district. The school's homogenous demographics – 81% White, 7% Black, 4% Latino/a (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012) – often results in the resistance to multicultural themes that Thein, Beach and Parks (2007) observe when “students push back and resist our efforts, often because they do not want to be implicated in institutional or systemic racism” (p. 58). Typical of the increasing class divide in our society, the demographic homogeneity in the school mirrors the class homogeneity with a mean income of \$107,138 in the school's primary zip code (Population Studies Center, 2010). Only 8% of students qualify for free/reduced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). With such stasis in the

student make-up, the discourse of meritocracy and achievement goes nearly unquestioned, which makes this study particularly suited to the setting to inquire the way students' perception of themselves as learners is mediated by structures of education.

The selection of setting, of course, is partially one of convenience as I will study the classroom where I teach in the school where I teach. Merriam (2008) cautions against convenience in sampling in that it may result in "information-poor" cases (p. 79). However, the study is really constructed around the setting, looking closely at the norms of the school. With its stance on understanding learning in local contexts, design-based research works to meet the needs of teacher-researchers with a critical stance. To better understand teaching and learning in my classroom, I selected through purposeful sampling my seventh period class, one of the three class periods that I teach juniors in inclusive American Literature, a mixed class of nineteen general education students and eleven special education students (Patton, 2002). This class period seemed a particularly fitting site of study for its wide range of student identities and abilities (as shown by the students' experiences expressed in my classroom and as defined by the school's procedures of labeling, which do not always yield the same results). Within my observations of the class, I have had the privilege to witness the rich construction and performance of identities: a football player who writes vivid fictions for class assignments; a musician who performs in a garage band with an androgynous alter ego reminiscent of David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust; two students whose families hail from cultures far-flung (Russia and West Africa); a student who rarely speaks in class but who builds computers in his spare time, working the trash detail in an apartment complex to afford the hardware; three girls who seem to wear their neon-dyed hair as a cultural signifier of their rebellion to the upper middle class norms predominant in the school; students who participate in a wide range of activities – robotics,

fencing, drama, track and field; students who have written poignantly in *This I Believe* essays of the experiences and perspectives that guide their senses of being. But I have also seen the way that the machinations of school have flattened these selves into the identities most recognized in the school context: students successful at navigating the so-called meritocracy of school and students resistant to the discourse of achievement. The school structures identify five of the students as gifted, five of the students as previously staffed into special education services, two of the students previously labeled remedial, eleven students currently staffed into special education services, and one of the special education students as double-identified gifted as well.

What gives this classroom such potential in this study were the tensions that emerge between the complex, lived identities and the flattened school identities. In many circumstances that rich ecology of life dulls to the fixed patterns of procedural display. In this setting, I hoped to make safe the expression of their multifaceted identities and to observe whether their engagement with school and with literacy grows bold, rich and nuanced as they see literacy in this space as the opportunity to express their identities and understand their social worlds. Of thirty students, twenty-seven consented to become participants in the study's instructional design and ethnographic observations. As I introduced dialogic literacy practice to open pathways to participation, I noted the way students across the class responded, in ways that I hoped would afford more participation across the social context, more engagement in reading and writing, and more agency in learning.

From the class, I also selected a panel of students from different levels of ability (according to my own observations and according to the school's sorting and ranking) to offer insights on classroom activity through individual interviews and focus group interviews. Heath and Street (2008) follow an emergent pattern in seeking participants from the social scene that

act as “telling cases” in that their attitudes and behaviors relate to what the researcher has seen of typical and routine ways of life (p. 64). However, Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999) caution researchers that the insights that key participants provide by virtue of their understandings of specific community practices “should never be treated as representative of an entire population” (p. 86). Accordingly, Miles and Huberman (1994) emphasize the need to find “disconfirming” cases as participants who seem to disprove the idea of a representative samples, a student whose ideas and experiences go against the grain of the class as a whole. Taking into account each of these sampling strategies, I have tried to select as wide-ranging focus group as possible to represent the wide ecology of social life in the classroom and in the school. Pending consent and assent to participate in the study, I selected students to be telling cases to look at the experiences of students who represent high, middle and low-achieving student groups, according to the school structures (for now, I refer to these students by initial; upon entrance to the study, I will ask each student to choose a pseudonym to protect his or her anonymity):

Student	Identity expressed in classroom (briefly)? Participation and engagement in classroom?	Student as labeled by school?
Hannah	<p>Friendly in one-on-one exchanges, Hannah plays soccer and has a wide friend group, but she still prefers a quiet corner in the classroom.</p> <p>She expresses a strong interest in social issues through her writing and she reads for fun, mostly YA romance novels. But she only participates sporadically in class discussion.</p>	On-level, 3.1 GPA
Nathan	<p>More mature than his peers, Nathan portrays a sense of self-possession. He writes about issues in the justice system for most essays, and plans to study criminal justice.</p> <p>He speaks with a strong sense of conviction, but his contributions to class discussion also come with a sense of being forced to speak. He reads class readings, particularly <i>The Things They Carried</i>, with genuine interest.</p>	On-level, 2.6 GPA Previously labeled remedial in 2012
Angela	Angela is creative and passionate – she wears her passions for music an art as a personal aesthetic with iridescent hair colors, expressive	Special Education, 2.7 GPA

	<p>clothing and make-up. She has a warmth that many students may miss when they make assumptions based her dress and appearance.</p> <p>In class, Angela speaks with conviction and eloquence on social issues important to her and her response to the literature we read. She frequently introduces ideas of great complexity into our class discussions.</p>	
Bryan	<p>High-achieving and driven, Bryan speaks and writes eloquently. He is very careful with his time to manage a wide range of extracurricular and sports activities.</p> <p>He contributes more than most students in the class, typically focused and seemingly genuinely engaged in discussions of literature.</p>	Gifted, 3.9 GPA
Faith	<p>Faith has a friendly and outgoing personality, but she rarely ventures ideas in whole-class discussion. She is a driven student, but not as AP-obsessed as some of her peers. She takes mostly honors classes. Though she has a positive and kind spirit, she at times seems to express an attitude of indifference in the class, perhaps judging the students and curriculum as not as advanced as she would like it to be.</p>	On-level and honors, 3.25 GPA
Tray	<p>Tray has a friendly and open demeanor before and after the bell, talking with friends or seeking out conversation with me or my co-teacher. Talking about his job or the computer he is building or the game he is playing, he is animated and charismatic. But the minute the bell rings, he seems to withdraw, almost to hibernation.</p> <p>He completes his work, more or less, but only to the most basic level. He does not participate in class discussion in nearly any form (whole class or small group), unless he is called on.</p>	Special Education, 2.39 GPA
Lucas	<p>Lucas is quiet to the point that it seems he would almost render himself invisible. He keeps his posture coiled into himself. He does struggle with reading and writing, and thus also with motivation. Outside of class, he is an avid gamer, and he plans to become a police officer.</p>	Special Education, 1.97 GPA

Each of these students navigate the social world of the classroom in distinct ways, but they also express some of the identity traits and attitudes shared among peers in the same level of achievement. The goal of the interview process set out to see if their ascription to social groups shifted as they considered new identities or ways of being. Lincoln and Guba (1985) call attention to the importance of building trust as one selects participants “who provide the inquiry team with an ‘inside’ view of the norms, attitudes, constructions, processes, and culture that characterize the local setting” (p. 258). A reciprocal relationship with participants goes beyond

the observer and the observed, situating research as a social transaction through which the process of research may lead to meaning-making between participants and researcher. Likewise, Madison's (2005) framework for critical ethnography calls for recognizing each participant "not as an object, but a subject with agency, history, and his or her own idiosyncratic command of a story" (p. 25). The goal of the interview process with the purposeful sample of students from the class then was to establish the kind of trust in which participants can freely express their experiences of education. Perhaps then their voices can represent the inside view of students experiencing school in similar ways.

Research Design Phase 2: Implementing Cycles of Intervention

The second methodological phase implements cycles of design alternating intervention with analysis to observe the impact of the intervention on the local classroom environment. Gravemeijer and Cobb (2006) point out that the point of iterative design is to go beyond simply verifying that the intervention worked, but to continue to innovate and to develop understandings of how and why it worked. In planning this instructional unit, I saw that aim of continually refining the intervention as necessary in reshaping pathways to participation. In the preliminary design of interventions, I used the goals I defined as ending points in phase 1 to prioritize several main aspects of the intervention:

- Conceptual focus and shifts in the unit on identity construction in young adults, and that problematizes notions of identity as biological, fixed or autonomous (Beach, Johnston, Thein, 2015). Conceptual shifts in the unit that start with orienting ideas about identity and social worlds, then moves to analyzing and critiquing the social worlds of school, and concludes with renegotiating identity and social positions in restrictive social worlds.
- Text selections that set the stage for making connections between the text and self, peers, and social worlds conversations, and sanction tough, heteroglossic conversations. (O'Donnell Allen, 2011, Thein, Beach, & Parks, 2007)
- Literacy practices in the classroom that challenge the hegemonic norms procedural display. Dialogue, activities and assignments open enough (through open questions,

personal response and connections, dialogic, mixed modalities, creative writing) to nurture students' authentic interests, perspectives and competencies.

Conceptual Focus and Text Selection

To explore Holland et al.'s (2001) concept of identity in figured worlds, worlds that permit agents to renegotiate identity towards more liberatory or authentic constructions, the unit built from observing issues related to identity construction in social worlds to critiquing the impact of schooling on identity construction to renegotiating identity in restrictive social worlds. The literary texts in this unit focus on teenage and young adult protagonists striving to construct identities in the social worlds that frequently pigeonhole those efforts (see Appendix A for the full list of text selections). Bean and Moni (2003) refer to the potential of young adult literature in affording a stance of critical literacy as “adolescent readers view characters in young adult novels as living and wrestling with real problems close to their own life experiences as teens” (p. 638). While many of the texts are intentionally multicultural showing a cross-section of teens in varying life experiences, social worlds and cultural backgrounds, the classroom positioning of the texts will not foreground the categorization of the texts as multicultural (as in a unit on the Harlem Renaissance or social justice) but rather on observing different ways of constructing and negotiating identity.

Part 1 of instructional unit – Tracing identity across time and social spaces. The first part of the unit lays the groundwork for more deliberate and thorough ways of thinking about identity. Drawing on Beach, Johnston, and Thein's (2015) pedagogical goals, the activities in this part of the unit sought to make the familiar less familiar, to have the fish question the water in which they swim, to understand the social worlds that often go unquestioned. Beach, Johnston, and Thein (2015) point out that many teens lack an ability to describe their identities with depth or complexity. To build a more robust vocabulary and conceptual framework for thinking about

identity, students read short excerpts from sociology and anthropology on the construction of identity. Starting with a film study of Zora Neal Hurston's (2006/1937) *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2009) TED Talk "Dangers of a Single Story," this part of the unit opened conversations of the ways that people construct identities in concert and in conflict with social worlds, the way people are recognized in their full complexity or the ways they are reduced to stereotypes or "single stories."

The anchor text of the unit is the YA novel *Everyday* by David Levithan (2012), an author interested in LGBTQ issues; a rather fantastic premise that showcases the fluidity of identity, the book tells the story of A., a character neither female nor male, who wakes each morning in the body of a different sixteen year old. He/she must then make sense of the person's identity, perspective and social worlds so as to disrupt the person's life as little as possible. Each day of A.'s life represents an opportunity to see teenage identity construction in progress. He/she goes to parties and church services; he/she experiences family dynamics of many forms; he/she faces the welter of social issues that teens in our society face – depression, inequity, pressure, alienation, and belonging. The book is ripe for dialogue and perspective-taking about what it means to grow up in America today.

Part 2 of instructional unit – Observing the construction of identity at school. The second part of the unit looks more closely at Institutional Identities (Gee, 200-2001) within the school setting. As the institution most familiar to students and perhaps the institution most influential in terms of social positioning, school offers much for inquiry and critique. Not only might students gain understanding of self by reflecting on the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that school impacts their identity construction (in the way students are labeled or tracked), in the ways that students may perform in concert or conflict with the discourse of the institution, but

students may also gain insight of institutional discourses beyond school. For example, if students come to see how the cultural trajectories of school position students into discourses of meritocracy (ambition and competition, achievement and failure), then they may also be able to see how other social or institutional discourses (class, race, gender) position people beyond school. In reading texts where characters wrestle with social positioning that restricts their authenticity and agency, students may take a more reflective eye on their own experiences. Holden Caulfield in the first few chapters of J.D. Salinger's (1991/1951) *Catcher in the Rye* stands outside the social circle of Pencey Prep where he has failed to learn that "Life [especially at Pencey Prep] is a game that one plays according to the rules" (p. 8). Naming those rules explicitly opens up rich possibilities for students inquiring the cultural trajectories at Pencey (and in turn, at Pruitt) – who benefits from these rules, who doesn't? What is the nature of the game? What is the purpose of the game? Fecho (2011) calls on Freire's (1970) concept of "naming the world" to take power through fully understanding a norm in order to reshape it. The text, as well, portrays Holden's alienation from the "phonies" at Pencey in ways that illuminate how social worlds shape identity: how Holden, Stradlater and Ackley perceive the social worlds of Pencey and how they construct identities in reaction to the way the social worlds position them.

Students also surveyed informational readings in topics relevant to the institution of schooling in our society today – college admissions, gifted education, tracking/ability-grouping, zero tolerance (based on topics important to individual students). Each of these topics related to the way society frames the cultural and institutional importance of school, and in turn impacts students' experiences of school. As students moved through literary and informational texts, the goal of discussion and dialogue was to open frank lines of communication about students' experiences of school, in ways that go beyond the initial complaints students make. Thinking

deeply through the unwritten rules of school and the way those rules impact identity construction and performance gave students a chance to enter into lines of inquiry and critique directly related to their lives, their social worlds and social futures.

Part 3 of instructional unit – Considering ways to renegotiate identity and positionality. The culminating part of the unit gave students the opportunity to resist or reframe social positioning. The focus shifts from reading to authoring. Through a creative or persuasive project, students worked to explore ways that the socials worlds around them have reduced their identity to a single story, and look for ways to resist that positioning. I selected readings that featured transformational reconstruction of identity represent agents of change – characters who claim agency and take action against the social worlds and discourses that attempt to limit them. In Lorraine Hansberry's (2004/1959) *A Raisin in the Sun*, each member of the Younger household finds ways to reclaim their authentic identities after facing challenges from discourses of race, gender and class inequality. Each character shows a different response to hegemonic attitudes, and each character takes agency in a different way. Beneatha Younger portrays a critical mindset of transgressing stereotypes and finding new avenues for expression; Walter Lee Younger appears to compromise in the face of despair but then resists the way discriminatory housing policy limits his dreams and his identity.

Pedagogical Interventions

Fecho (2011) notes the difficulty of teachers moving their classrooms toward dialogic spaces while still teaching with more limiting pedagogies; he goes on to suggest that teachers must advance without trepidation from the pedagogical patterns that limit participation and inquiry. According to Nystrand (1996), the stated goals of classroom activity must match the actual goals, meaning that teachers may often espouse open interpretation but assess with quizzes

or tests that demand one particular answer, contradicting the very purpose of dialogic inquiry. Moving to dialogic activities in the setting where I teach hinges on finding ways to short-circuit procedural display driven mostly by grades and narrow forms of assessment. In this unit, the instructional design sought to establish the curricular cohesion that establishes high standards and rigor through participatory literacy practices (Applebee et al., 2003).

With the problems of authoritative assessments in mind, I planned to forego these typical forms of reading checks that orient the purpose in reading to passing the quiz and test. Freed from the constraints of multiple-choice test, students might be freer to react and respond to the text on their own terms. Along with the orienting goals that frame the purposes of the intervention, I outlined a series of literacy activities that draw on students' competencies outside of school and that attempt to form connections between texts and lives outside of school. For example, in the first part of the unit, students curated a collection of the ways that the media represents teenage life in either complex or nuanced ways; students gathered song lyrics, advertisements, movie clips and other portrayals, which will serve as the starting point for discussing the ways that teens can be reduced to a "single story" in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's terms. In the final part of the unit, students reclaimed and remixed these images with additional texts and images to widen the perspective on their personal identity or on the social worlds of teens around them (see Appendix B for the full plan of literacy activities).

Borrowing from Fecho's (2011) project plan for writing through a "dialogical series" assigned in a college course based on incremental, reflective writings that culminates in a final piece, students did much journaling that afforded time and space to look at ideas and texts in focused ways but then also synthesized and connected ideas and texts from throughout the unit. According to Fecho (2011), "Key to this process is that ideas expressed in the earliest entries

could and often do get continued exposure in the exploration papers [connecting texts at 1-month intervals] and have life in those final projects” (p. 109). Open-ended and response-oriented, journals replaced other forms of classwork and quizzes and gave students an opportunity to make sense of the texts and the concepts related to identity. Nystrand (1996) as well advocates a response journal that the teacher can pull excerpts (posted anonymously) to start discussion in classes where students may hesitate to tackle tough topics.

Dsythe (2011) refers to the ways teachers can still build “opportunity spaces” for dialogic inquiry even in schools predicated on high-stakes testing that seems by nature anti-dialogic. The teacher in Dsythe’s study makes time for free-ranging and student-centered discussion, but she also realizes the importance of helping students to feel prepared for AP exams and other forms of standardized testing that hold such bearing on their futures. In my class, students take the Georgia Pathways End-of-Course Test, which accounts for 20% of their final grade in the class and also serves as a requirement for high school graduation; juniors also face the pressure of taking the SAT or ACT for college admissions. Dsythe (2011) notes that teachers can take a “both/and” rather than an “either/or” approach to authentic dialogic activities and scripted standardized ones. In her class, students spend the majority of their time in open-ended discussion, constructing nuanced and contingent meanings, but students also learn to decipher questions on high-stakes tests (particularly AP tests) that privilege one correct interpretation toward one authoritative response. Her teaching empowers her students to realize the artificiality of these singular interpretations but also to be able to score well, in other words to beat the machine at its own game. Likewise, Morrell (2011) calls for “access to dissent” as the development of formal academic skills in order to engage in divergent discourse with the systems of authority. Giving students license to critique the institutional norms of their own

schooling can serve as a form of empowerment that can shift students from passive observer to active constructor.

Taking the stance of using writing to develop both dialogic inquiry and academic skills, the writing assignments in the unit build from shorter reflective writings to longer and more refined and academically-developed writings to, as Fecho suggests, keep returning to the conversation across time and space:

To write anything once is to gain only the insight of that one moment in that one context. By relocating in time and space—by going through our daily lives and engaging with other experiences—we fill our well of understanding and connection. (p. 107)

Across the readings, discussions, and writings in this unit, it was my hope that students would continue to shape and reshape their notions of self in social worlds, with each interaction building upon the previous.

Ethnographic Methods in Design-Based Research

According to Barab and Squire (2004), the purpose of design-based research using ethnographic methods is “to lay open and problematize the completed design and resultant implementation in a way that provides insight into the local dynamic... and to characterize the complexity, fragility, messiness, and eventual solidity of the design and doing so in a way that will be valuable to others” (p. 8, 4). Ethnographic observation centers the goal of research in understanding the culture of the classroom, one that seeks to understand the ecological interactions across individuals, groups, norms and practices. Heath and Street (2008) frame the potential of classroom ethnographic research to disrupt the easy and stable dichotomies that simplify more complex notions of how people learn. Similarly, Gutiérrez and Vossoughi (2011), call on design research to help the researcher and practitioner, working in concert, to expose the complexities of learning by making the familiar strange:

This “strangifying” role is particularly important to making visible the routinized practices of work and educational spaces, bringing to the surface potential contradictions between these practices and the objects or desired outcomes of activity. (p. 104)

Ethnographic observation to make the familiar practices of procedural display inherent in the passive pedagogies that ask for engagement but position students into inauthentic roles and practices.

The emphasis on understanding culture stands at the center of ethnography, but Heath (1988) cautions that many studies positioned as ethnographic studies through the basic qualitative characteristics of being “naturalistic, ecological, and holistic” lack the fundamental orientations of traditional ethnography (p. 33). While educational ethnographic studies do differ significantly from anthropological ethnography in Heath’s conception of the two practices, she argues that ethnographic studies must connect to one or more of the fundamental stances and practices of ethnography – ethnohistorical research, attention to the definition of the unit of study, microethnographic work, linguistic investigation, analysis of artifacts – in order to meet the goal of observing culture in its full complexity:

Ethnohistorical research. In understanding the culture of a group, the researcher must give attention to the development of culture across time and space by reviewing the historical development and archives of the site. Heath laments the lack of attention to understanding “the histories of schools, communities past and present that make up the student population, and special interest groups (such as labor unions. Local businesses and voluntary associations) that influenced school policies and programs” (p. 37). This study with its focus on students’ navigations of the institution of schooling does point to the importance of understanding cultural action within historical traditions, of looking to the vestiges of historical structures in current practices.

Attention to definition of the unit of study. In studying a particular setting, researchers must pay particular attention to the ways that the setting is defined in essentialist or reductive ways by the institution itself, and which may in turn impact the way the researcher defines the space in reductive ways. For example, a classroom or school may define itself without accounting for the cultural diversity of the communities that interact with the school. In this study, this stance helped me to frame my observations of students in the classroom in terms of that space situated in other spaces, namely the identities they construct outside of the classroom. Defining the unit of study as our shared culture within the classroom as situated by all the other cultures that students bring into the spaces with them not only enriched the way I attempted to understand their negotiations of positionality but also the ways that I incorporated their identities outside of the classroom into the culture of the classroom.

Microethnographic work. In reacting to criticisms of traditional ethnography that fixes a sample in terms of the cultural whole in ways that do not appreciate individual differences and idiosyncrasies, the goal of microethnographic work is to avoid generalizing from the particular to the whole and to understand the organization of culture in all its particular iterations. According to Heath (1988),

Often one group of actors has one set of rules and operates according to this set; other participants have different sets of rules and operate accordingly. Neither recognizes that two sets of rules are in operation. In all situations, a pattern of interaction and rules for roles played by the actors emerges from a detailed account of the situation preserved in field notes (and sometimes supplemented by videotape), so that the ethnographer can return again and again to the data for analysis. (p. 38)

Seeing each group and interaction as distinct and attempting to understand the set of rules by which the groups relate to the school as a whole avoids the tendency to fix the activity of one group as representative of the whole (both in terms of agents and of agents across time). In this study, the stance of microethnographic work was particularly important in that I needed to avoid

the tendency of taking the experiences of students in focus groups and applying them to my understandings of the classroom as a whole. Rather I take Heath's stance of seeing microethnographic instances as part of a diachronic continuum, with each instance adding to understanding of the way cultures shift over time and over socially-situated spaces.

Linguistic investigation. In studying the speech and language of a culture, the researcher pays particular to the registers at play and the way registers relate to the social organization of the group. In classrooms that privilege formal speech, academic registers and discourses may crowd out and exclude home and community registers. Investigating the ways these registers interact and alternate in a cultural space may reveal much about the unspoken expectations for how students adjust to academic norms. Likewise, the student-oriented registers of the school (communicated through songs, sayings, cheers, or other shared speech) may signify meanings for the values and ways of being that students take up outside of academic registers. For example, at Pruitt, no pep rally or game is complete without the "I Believe" chant (as in the one depicted in ESPN's (2014) advertisement for the FIFA World Cup), which starts slow, staccato, and monosyllabic:

I: //

I: / be / LIEVE: //

I: / be / LIEVE: / that / WE: //

I: / be / LIEVE: / that we will WIN: //

But at the completion of the phrase, fervor takes hold and students stomp the rhythm with energy, speed and urgency:

I: / be / LIEVE: / that WE will WIN: / I: / be / LIEVE: / that WE will WIN: ...

For students who ascribe to the school's discourse of spirit and popularity, this is a shared cultural practice that includes an interesting interplay of pronouns expressing something of the school's orientation toward optimism, ambition, and paradoxically unity. Using Gee's toolkit of discourse analysis (2014), the activity seems to hinge group identity in the "WE" on the individual believing in the value of competition and winning. However, the shared cultural practice does not account for the students who choose to avoid pep rallies, instead going to the cafeteria for "study hall" where they also engage in raucous speech practices but not collective ones. Grouped mostly in smaller and greatly divergent social groups, students talking and laughing, playing cellphone games, taking pictures, doing homework, communicating on social media, playing hackie sack. What these two linguistic practices in juxtaposition reveal about the cultures of Pruitt is that the groups participating in each of these practices seem to have little knowledge of each other. The pep rally groups see the "I Believe" chant as a Pruitt tradition, one that shows who they are and what the school is. But they seem to little acknowledge the students who take no participation, value, or meaning in the practice. Out of sight of the pep rally participants, their "WE" as the idea of what Pruitt is only includes those that define themselves as the "I" and "WE." Thus, undergoing linguistic investigation of the way students use individual and collective speech illuminates some of the ways that cultural practices align and disalign across student groups.

Analysis of artifacts. Looking to the materials of a classroom space offered much potential for making the familiar strange, and questioning the ways the material culture of the classroom designate social practices and institutional values. Analyzing and critiquing functioning within the physical space including the orientation of desks, the materials and tools

available to students (or not available) highlighted the degree to which the space is collaborative or authoritative.

Heath (1988) points to the affordances of these essential components of traditional ethnography in conducting ethnographic studies without the full burden of traditional ethnography: “The goal is to illustrate how ethnographic research can provide data about ways of becoming literate, specific areas of knowledge about reading and writing, and cultural items that are employed by community members in teaching and using literacy” (p. 46). Likewise, Bloome and Greene (2004) suggest “adopting an ethnographic perspective” or “using ethnographic tools” to leverage the insights that come from ethnography study without the notions of 19th century anthropology that demand for immersive entry in an exotic culture and that attempted to present ultimate objectivity about a culture, and that often results in an imperialistic attitudes that other or exoticize peoples of different cultures. The current emphasis on situatedness in ethnographic studies foregoes the tendency to generalize in absolute terms. Rather than the observation of an outsider making conjectures about other people, Bloome and Greene (2004) call for “ethnography-in-education” to illustrate how “students and teachers have taken up the role of social scientists and adopted ethnographic perspectives and practices in order to explore their own communities” (p. 2). Taking up an ethnographic perspective and tools in this study hopefully gave me the opportunity to truly see how students navigate the culture of my classroom and the wider institutional and historical culture of schooling and how they make meaning of literature and life in these spaces.

Ethnographic Tools for Data Collection

Heath and Street (2008) draw a distinction between ethnography and qualitative research in that ethnographers should enter the field stripped of conceptual frameworks and research

questions and only equipped with the curiosity to understand the social scene and with the “core concern about the quality and integrity of human life” (p. 30). While this avocation is a noble but impractical one for a dissertation study that culminates from a year and a half of preparation, it still holds a central value for ethnographic data collection, it signals the need for an inductive mindset, looking to understand rather than to verify. Bogdan and Biklin (2007) refer to this mindset as “not putting together a puzzle whose picture you already know,” but rather as “constituting a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts” (p. 6). This study draws on the tools of ethnographic inquiry – observation, field notes, and interview – to gain emergent understandings of the socially-situated activities possible in a dialogic space.

According to Van Maanen (1982),

The result of ethnographic inquiry is cultural description. It is, however, a description of the sort that can emerge only from a lengthy period of intimate study and residence in a given social setting. It calls for the language spoken in that setting, first-hand participation in some of the activities that take place there, and most critically, a deep reliance on intensive work with a few [participants] drawn from the setting. (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 28).

Below, I identify the parts of the ethnographic study: observation, videorecordings, and artifact analysis of writing samples for all students in the class, individual and focus group interviews for students from representative groups,

Participant Observation and Video Recording. The typical question for researchers entering a field of their degree of interaction with the scene is what Bogdan and Biklen (2007) refer to as the “participant/observer continuum,” and the researcher should place themselves on the continuum based on “internalizing” their research goals and questions. In other words, the degree of participation coincides with whether participation yields observations and interactions that coincides with the purpose of the study. As a teacher-researcher, the clear answer is that I am integrally involved in the social scene, except that the purpose of the study is to continue to

center classroom practices on students rather than teacher or text. Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999) see advantages in the researcher's participation in the field, namely a more familiar and intuitive understanding of the scene, and a more trusting relationship between participants and researcher. The study, I hope, benefited from the relationship I have worked to develop with my students over the last seven months; they (for the most part) understand the ways I hope to shift the purpose of education in our classroom, and (for the most part) trust that I have their interests at heart. As I moved into the intervention cycle of the unit and tried to establish more open-ended inquiry that short-circuits the typical forms of monologic activity, these lines of trust worked to build an environment conducive for dialogic risk-taking.

Observing classroom activity, I looked for students' response to the study's iterative designs – which texts permit perspective-taking, which discussion patterns lead to more participation, which activities allow students to express emergent ideas about identity? At the starting point of research, the participant observer, according to Spradley (1980) enters the social scene with two purposes: “to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and to observe the activities, people and physical activities of the situation” (p. 54). This dual-purpose brings an “explicit awareness” of the actors and activities, their actions overt and subtle, to remain attuned to the individual motivations as well as the tacit social rules (Spradley, 1980, p. 54, 57). Merriam (2009) advises the observer to notice the arrangement of space, the social interactions of the participants, the direction of communication, the actors in activity, the direction of conversation, the nonverbal and gestural forms of communication. Spradley (1980) identifies nine dimensions with a question matrix to attune the observer to the socially-situated actions of actors in a space:

- Space: the physical space or places
- Actor: the people involved
- Activity: a set of related acts people do
- Object: the physical things that are present

- Act: single actions that people do
- Event: a set of related activities that people carry out
- Time: the sequencing that takes place over time
- Goal: the thing that people are trying to accomplish
- Feeling: the emotions felt and expressed (p. 78)

Spradley's matrix seems to parallel the interrelationship of actors and the wider sociocultural context in Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamäki's (1999) model of activity theory. This bidirectional model posits learning as a mediated activity that flows between a subject, mediated artifacts or tools (across the social as well as historical context), a community, and the rules or norms of that community. Observing activities through a sociocultural analytical lens to better understand how agents (students) operate within a community (peers and teacher) with the rules of that community (the norms and expectations of success, the norms that define literacy practices in a high-achieving high school) and the tools and artifacts (both immediate, cultural and historical texts and ideas) that mediate activity, internalization, and identity.

The goal of thorough and attuned observation is to gain the type of detail and nuance to permit Geertz's concept of "thick description," an essential part of ethnographic research. To train focus on the phenomena of most importance, since as Merriam (2009) points out, the observer cannot see it all, the researcher should use research questions and orienting goals as a guiding lens. Planning this study, it became almost impossible to reconcile the many roles I assumed as the study progresses: teacher, facilitator, instruction designer, observer, analyst. Observing my class is something that I do every day but the "explicit awareness" needed for data collection in observation is not something I can manage with the other roles. I hoped to catch fleeting observations as I listened to my students, responded to their conversations and asked reciprocal questions that built on their dialogue, but I knew that I would not be able to see nearly enough. The social activity of the classroom is the most essential part – to see how students

respond to new concepts, to each other; to note moments when students take up more authentic ways of being; and to note the moments when students follow similar patterns of activity without an appreciable shift in activity or perspective. Using video to record classroom interactions allowed me to see much more of the social life of the classroom than I would see in the present-tense chaos of most classrooms and especially of dialogic spaces that remove some of the authoritative discipline structures of conventional classrooms.

According to Heath, Hindmarsh and Luff (2010), video recordings of the social scene in naturalistic research affords researchers the chance to more closely observe nonverbal and gestural social interactions, and to note the interplay between verbal and nonverbal communication. Their method of transcription and analysis looks first to talk and second to visible conduct to reveal how “the production of an action, its meaning or intelligibility is accomplished with regard to the contributions of others; in particular the immediately preceding actions and activities” (p. 82). In Farrington-Darby and Wilson’s (2008) video ethnography of railroad controllers, the study relied on video not only to verify and fill in understandings of the social scene culled from present-tense participant observation. Reviewing video in a three-part analytical process revealed a complex and interrelated nature between social interaction and work productivity. Personal relationships and informal banter often resulted in closer forms of collaboration and higher rates of accuracy in work tasks. Anticipatory pauses, contingent utterances, conversational turns, gestures and postures all contribute to the interactional activities of meaning-making in participatory dialogue. Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff (2010) argue,

Video enables us to explore these interdependencies and how talk – what is said, how it is said and the sense and sequential import it achieves – can be embodied within, and dependent upon, the participants’ orientation to and engagement with features of the immediate environment. (p. 92)

Video permits fine-grained analysis of fragments of interaction, what Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff (201) term the ten-second frames of activity identified through a preliminary review of footage, to better understand the social and institutional roles that agents take up and express through verbal and nonverbal communication.

Barron's (2008) examination of what video affords research in the particular context of learning starts from the position that emergent coding (rather than pre-established coding structures inherent in the history of naturalistic studies and necessary for the fast pace of *in situ* observation) yields greater understandings of the socially-situated nature of learning such as informal learning among peers where students negotiate norms in resistance to institutional or adult structures and goals. Barron identifies important video studies of children's informal learning behaviors and of cultural interaction patterns that challenged status quo assumptions about learning, language and culture (such as Lewin's (1926) study of his children engaged in play negotiating meaning through peer relationships, Mead's (1942) studies of Balinese parent-child relationships that challenged stereotypes about "other" cultures, McDermott's (1976) study of reading circles that centered on biological assumptions about learning ability but revealed teachers denying help to the students who needed the most guidance). With video, the assumptions of the researcher (sometimes explicit, sometimes tacit) cannot stand up to the more objective viewer of the camera lens, and the process of video analysis allow researchers to see nuances in the social context that may contradict their preconceived notions.

For this study, videotaping classroom activities aided my analysis of the social context in several ways – yielding better understandings of the subtle and overt activity, looking closely at the interrelation between verbal and nonverbal communication patterns, and challenging any preconceived notions I had about how the iterative patterns of design will unfold. I was able to

see the nonverbal and subtle reactions to activities part of the iterative design of the study; students often express their acceptance or resistance through gestural and attitudinal markers before they express it verbally. I was able to observe *in situ* and *ex situ* the ways that students negotiate meaning, challenge assumptions, and confront heteroglossic tensions without my participation as a facilitator. Watching and rewatching activities unfold in the classroom allowed for detailed analysis of the immediate social context playing out from peer-to-peer, and also to question the way that the extended social and institutional context might inform particular actions and reactions.

Descriptive Field Notes and Reflective Conceptual Memos. To make sense of the sociocultural activity happening in any observation, ethnographic theorists advocate a two-part process of first recording the (mostly) objective events of what happens over the course of the observation (called field notes by Heath and Street (2008) and called descriptive field notes by Bogdan and Biklen (2007)) and second reflecting on the meanings that emerge from observations and field notes (called conceptual memos by Heath and Street (2008) and called reflective field notes by Bogdan and Biklen (2007)). Regardless of terminology, the approach conceptualized by each methodologist establishes a research practice that allows the researcher to take stock of the sociocultural context. Heath and Street (2007) urge researchers to distinguish between their reflections on happenings and the empirical accounts of what unfolded through the two-part process, or at least a two-column process. For field notes, researchers should at the minimum record:

- Running account of events in real time.
- Notable short phrases uttered by interlocutors so that audio- or videorecordings can more easily be coordinated with field recordings.

- Changes in audience routines and rituals, and features of context that co-occur with shifts in language and modes. (p. 77)

Their emphasis on objectivity in recording events in field notes stems from the need to avoid value judgments and preferred assumptions in interpreting the actions of the scene. According to Heath and Street (2008),

[Research questions] must be of such a nature that they can be answered through *empirical* evidence... To ask if one set of socialization practices is “better” than another is to rule out application of empirical evidence from ethnographic fieldwork. “Better” for what, for whom or under which circumstances must be delineated in quantifiable and specifiable terms instead. (p. 76, emphasis in original)

The goal of day-to-day fieldwork (in observations and field notes) is to render the scene in as much detail and nuance as possible. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) go on to define objectivity in writing field notes as the researcher’s efforts to render the scene in specific actions rather than in “abstract words [that] will lead you to gloss over than to dissect” (p. 121). To record the rich data that will serve as the raw material for analysis, the researcher should record:

- “Portraits of the subjects” that describes the individual rather than general attributes of participants: “their physical appearance, dress, mannerisms, and style of talking and acting.”
- “Reconstruction of dialogue” that records paraphrases of entire conversations as well as direct-quotations of words and phrases unique to the setting, activity, participants. Dialogue also includes the nonverbal forms of communication through gestures, attitudes, demeanors dialects, inflections, and facial expressions.
- “Description of physical setting” that notes the arrangement of the physical space, the use of the physical space, and artifacts that define the physical space.
- “Accounts of particular events” that recall participants in observed events as well as their role in the event.
- “Depiction of activities” that includes “detailed descriptions of behaviors, trying to reproduce the sequence of both behaviors and particular acts.”

- “Observer’s behavior” that notes that the researcher must “take stock of their own behavior, and whatever else might affect the data that are gathered and analyzed” (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, p. 121-122)

Mills and Morton (2013) also note the importance of the observer taking stock of their own positionality as no observation can be truly objectivity but can only be situated in the researcher’s own knowledge and perspective. Writing field notes in the first person and admitting to the inevitability of subjectivity calls attention to the factors that may impact the researcher’s understanding of the scene. However, Mills and Morton (2013) caution researchers to “chart a course between narcissistic self-indulgence and the risky assumption that one’s experience is self-evidently true” (p. 85).

To enable me to record as much detail as possible from what I observed (initially without the intermediary of the videorecording), I used Davis’s (2008) digital diary protocol (Davis, 2014). Rather than writing field notes, the researcher speaks their recollections of the observed phenomena into an audio recorder immediately upon leaving the observation without “transference or loss of thought between [the researcher’s] reflections and the written text” (p. 98). For me, I believed the act of speaking my observations would short-circuit my tendency to analyze prematurely, to comment on what I observed. The digital diary focused solely on what I viewed each day in the classroom. Since the class I selected to study is my last class of the day, I was mostly able to immediately record what I remembered of the class period before the details faded. As I recorded students’ activities in descriptive field notes through the digital diary protocol, I was able to notice more than I would notice under typical classroom circumstances, I hoped it allowed me to see the ways that students negotiate ideas and identity in a refigured classroom space.

Reflective field notes or conceptual memos, as well as observer comments on descriptive field notes begin the process of interpretation, looking for patterns in the observed data, and also raising questions about what the researcher observes. Heath and Street (2008) refer to Heath's weekly practice of looking at "Problems and Setbacks" to raise issues impeding the field experience itself, "Overview" to keep track of time spent in the field and data collected, and most importantly "Patterns, Insights, and Breakthroughs" to note emergent themes that may guide analysis. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) note the reflective field notes allow the researcher to speculate, reflect and confess, noting their emergent understandings, considering possible reasons for observed phenomena, and admitting to mistakes in the research process and errors in judgement. The goal of self-reflection guides the researcher to make sense of the data through four reflective practices:

- "Reflections on analysis" that makes hunches and speculations on what the research reveals: "the themes that are emerging, patterns that may be present, connections between pieces of data, additional ideas and thoughts that pop up."
- "Reflections on method" that evaluate and critique the research methods including rapport with participants, advances, impediments, or dilemmas in the research process, approaches to solving problems in data collection.
- "Reflections on ethical dilemmas and conflicts" that addresses the researchers' concerns about "their values and responsibilities to [their] subjects as well as to [their] profession."
- "Reflections on the observer's state of mind" that allow researchers to question their tacit assumptions and preconceptions including "religious beliefs, political ideology, cultural background, position in society, experience in the schools, race or gender. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 123)

Challenging initial assumptions about the research practice stands at the foundation of inductive research; these reflective memos challenge the researcher to see the data for what it is and to put

aside their preconceived notions. In this way, real meaning begins to emerge, true to the scene, true to the participants (as much as possible).

In this research project, reflective conceptual memos held especial importance. My embeddedness in the classroom, my familiarity with students and with classroom practices (after seven months with the students in my class) might cloud the way I interpreted activity in the space, might mean that I continued to evaluate activity based on the same measures I have evaluated activity all year. The sociocultural approach to research advocated by Smagorinsky (2011) necessitates that researchers undergo active inquiry of their own socioculturally-situated assumptions and motivations to avoid misconstruing the participants' concept development with their own trajectories:

- How the researcher and the participant view the task, how the participant's task construal develops during the course of the research, which aspects of the activity setting help to account for this development, and the degree of intersubjectivity that is in play in participants' construction of the task in relation to the researcher's intentions
- How researcher's and participants' relative senses of trajectory have been culturally mediated in their personal histories
- How researchers' and participants' respective personal histories have been culturally situated and channeled in order to produce the understandings that they bring to the research setting... (p. 232)

Memos will be an important practice for considering and reconsidering instructional interventions and the students' uptake of those interventions; reacting to each day's activity through a sociocultural lens will help to draw clearer lines between my own socially-situated readings and the readings of my students. In particular, I looked to Smagorinsky's emphasis on personal history and cultural trajectory as the need to link activity in the classroom to where my students come from and where they are going as channeled by their socially-constructed futures.

The process of recording observations through field notes and conceptual memos will also enable me to work through the iterations of design in design-based research; observing the ways the instructional design unfolded, noting the ways that students accept or resist the design will help me to reconceive design for following classes.

Individual and Focus Group Interviews. The purpose of interviews in this study is to probe more fully the way individuals navigate identity construction with and in conflict with school. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, I planned to interview the focus participants individually in the first part of the instructional unit to ask each student to describe the ways they form their identity, to recount their experiences with school, to interpret how they make sense of the social worlds of school. These interviews built on class activities, readings and discussions, but allow students to elaborate more fully. Especially for students rendered quiet or resistant by the social world of the school, the individual interview may permit them a chance to open up and discuss ideas that they cannot express in the course of class discussions. According to Patton (2002),

We interview people to find out from them those things that we cannot directly observe and to understand what we observe... The fact of the matter is that we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time... We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. (p. 426)

To build rapport with interview sources and to elicit elaborate responses from participants, I called on Patton's (2002) six types of semi-structured interview questions to write wide-ranging questions:

- "Experience and behavior questions" to inquire into participants' actions and activities
- "Opinions and values questions" to find out participants' beliefs and attitudes

- “Feeling questions” to draw responses about emotional and affective response to subject
- “Knowledge questions” to elaborate on participants’ conceptual and factual awareness
- “Sensory questions” to elicit vivid details about the participants’ experiences in terms of how they lived it through their visceral senses.
- “Background/demographic questions” that ask about the participants’ social status and basic information as related to the study. (p. 350)

Drawing on Patton’s interview strategy, the questioning focuses on the ways that teens have constructed identity across the social worlds in school and out of school. Both Patton (2002) and Heath and Street (2008) note that ethnographic interviews should focus on what is happening, not why it is happening; the goal is to understand the lived reality of the social phenomena not the teleology of it. Without making assumptions about how students navigate the social worlds of school, the interview questions first asked students to describe their histories of identity construction, and then to recount their experiences of school in terms of identity construction and performance. Examples of interview questions include (see Appendix C for interview protocols):

- How do you describe your identity?
- Do you feel your identity changes over time? Changes in different environments? In what ways?
- What are the things or situations that let you most be yourself?
- What do you wish your teachers knew about you?
- In what classes or times, do you feel like you were able to best express who you are?
- Are there times when you have felt labeled or misunderstood in school? Can you describe those times?
- What parts of your identity or what competencies/abilities do you wish were more recognized in school?

- In what ways do you think you could incorporate more of your interests and competencies into school and other social environments?
- What type of social environments do you find most nurturing? In what ways might you begin to contribute to a sense of community that accepts people for their differences and celebrates individuality?

These questions built on ideas explored in class activities and give the students opportunity to grapple with their construction of identity in a more focused way.

I planned to interview each of the students in the purposeful sampling group first individually to build rapport and to avoid students' altering their responses based on the social context, and to minimize students' discomfort in providing details about their lives. However, I intended to conduct focus group interviews for the third (and possibly the second) phase of interviews with students that seem comfortable with talking in a group about their experiences constructing identities in school. Timing proved to make the third round of interviews impossible; however, many of the students in the purposeful sampling group participated in Socratic seminars that centered on some of the same issues that I would have asked in my focus group protocol. Patton (2002) sees that affordances of focus group interviews as the collaborative negotiation of meaning:

In a focus group, participants get to hear each other's responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say. However, participants need not agree with each other or reach any kind of consensus. Nor is it necessary for people to disagree. The goal is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others. (p. 386)

Starting focus groups in part two of the instructional design (Observing the construction of identity in school), I would have first brought together in focus groups students identified in the school setting in similar ways (high-achieving students with other high-achieving students, special education students with other special education students). In this way, I hope students to

feel comfortable discussing their experiences of school with students who may have had some of the same experiences of being labeled in similar ways. I do realize the difficulty of reifying the very structures of labeling that the study intends to call into question; however, I feel that groups of students across labels would not be able to be open and honest in terms of how the structures of schooling have impacted their experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and senses of self.

In the third part of the unit (Considering ways to renegotiate identities), I brought students from differently labeled groups together in Socratic seminars to describe ways that they might negotiate identity in contrast with the institution's structures of sorting and ranking. In transgressing the simplistic identities that students might have felt compromised their multifaceted identity, students across social groups may discover that they have more in common than the social patterns of the classroom may indicate. Hearing the perspectives of other students may in and of itself offer the opportunity for self-reflection and for greater understanding of self and of school.

Writing Samples. With the unit's emphasis on responsive and transactional writing in several forms (journals, creative writing, argumentative), samples of writing from both the focus participants and the whole class offered an "information-rich" source of students' meaning-making and response to the iterative design cycle, that also remained unaltered by the researcher's presences as in interviews and observations (Merriam, 2008, p. 79). As a space where a student can enter into a dialogue with his or her own beliefs and experiences, responsive writing encourages a practice of self-reflection. Fecho (2011) argues,

Dialogical writing represents an intersection of academic and personal writing that allows writers to bring multiple voices to the work; involves thought, reflection and engagement across time and located in space; and creates opportunities for substantive and ongoing meaning-making. (p. 107)

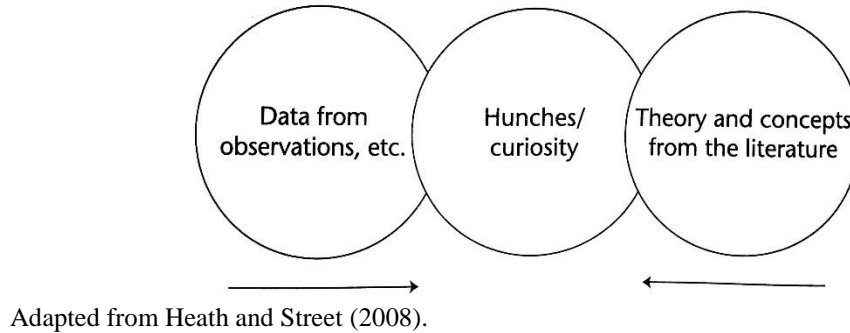
Perhaps even more than observational data, writing samples permitted me to gain a real sense of the ways that an identity-focused classroom practice offers opportunities for substantive engagement and agentic learning, on the part of all students. Reading and analyzing the ways that students negotiated ideas on their own terms but (hopefully) informed by classroom dialogue helped me to see the way each student responded to curricular and pedagogical interventions. Informal writing opportunities started with students tracing their identity across time and space using Gee's (2000-2001) identity types, noting the unwritten rules of school in terms of the ways that impacts students' identity construction, and transgressing limiting discourses by asserting the labels that limit senses of self (see Appendix D for writing sample protocol; these prompts remained tentative as the instructional design emerged based on students' response in class dialogue).

Iterative Analysis to Bridge Design and Data Collection

The study design paired ethnographic data collection with the design-based research process of iterative design. Both methods seek nuanced understandings of naturalistic learning environments as complex ecologies of socially-situated life. Heath and Street (2008) refer to the recursive pattern of ethnographic methods between observing and theorizing, which parallels the cycles of design and reflection in design-based research. Like design-based research, ethnography seeks to build theories: "Ethnographers construct, test, and amplify theoretical perspectives through systematic observing, recording and analyzing of human behavior in specifiable spaces and interactions" (Heath and Street, 2008, p. 38). Looking for patterns in the data, the researcher begins to build an "intellectual framework" based on their hypotheses and hunches about what the data shows; then the researcher tests these hunches against theories reported in other studies. Heath and Street (2008) refer to this recursive process as "constant

comparative” in that it looks from the present to the past understandings of the topic and even foresees future understandings.

Figure 3. Heath and Street’s (2008) Recursive Process in Doing Ethnography



This recursive analysis in the midst of data collection parallels the iterative design process in design-based research in the way that it seeks to establish ontologies from lived experience. However, design-based research orients iterative design toward innovation and intervention, using data collection to make clearer the ways to improvise instructional and research design. To guide a data collection process that bridges as action-oriented intervention with passive observation, Reinking and Bradley (2008) notes that observing the impact of interventions as the cycles of design and observation proceed heightens the purpose to document how participants respond, looking for intended and unintended consequences. Researchers seek descriptive data to confirm positive impacts, or to guide redesign based on negative impacts; however, researchers may find that the overlapping cycles of intervention blur their ability to discern the reasons for change. But Bradley and Reinking (2008) refer to Dewey’s concept of “collateral learning” to refer to unexpected progress that merits inquiry to discover additional theories. The responsive nature of the intervention and observation process is motivated to see and understand change. The orientation towards action connects to Dewey’s pragmatism to first inspire change in the local context and then beyond the local context: “systems of inquiry rooted not in claims of truth,

but rather in the viability of theories to explain phenomena and produce change in the world” (Barab and Squire, 2004, p. 7).

LeCompte and Schensul (2010) caution that researchers can become “hapless vacationers” modifying their research design in reaction to unexpected phenomena in the research setting without reflecting on whether the modifications connect to the purposes of the research. As research unfolded and brought unexpected obstacles, the orienting goals I devised in the first phase of research and the research questions for the overall study guided the improvisations that move the research design (both in terms of iterative pedagogical design and of data collection) in new directions. Writing conceptual memos afforded me the opportunity to improvise without losing sight of the goals of research – to identify hindrances and errors to the design, to consider what students need to break the confines of procedural display, to highlight gains in establishing opportunities for authentic dialogue. Merriam (2009) also suggests that researchers complete their own transcription work; making time and space in the transcription process to meticulously process the participants’ thoughts and to record observer comments moves the research toward analysis and interpretation during the still-emergent data collection period. Thus, reflecting on findings during data collection afforded me the opportunity to ask participants through interviews and focus groups to elaborate on my emergent understandings, asking participants’ to clarify their perspective to evaluate and even to contradict the sense I make from their experiences (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009). As both iterative and recursive, the meaning-making process moved the research from just recording to negotiating ontological understandings in the midst of data collection.

Research Design Phase 3: Retrospective Analysis

To orient design-based research toward ontological innovation at the completion of data collection, Collins, Joseph, and Bielaczyc (2004) present five intertwined viewpoints or levels of analysis that foster ways of seeing the intertwined complexities of the learning context – cognitive, interpersonal, group and classroom, resource, institutional. These intertwined levels guide the researcher’s vision, to observe the progress of the intervention and the degree to which it fosters change. What Collins, Joseph, and Bielaczyc’s framework establishes is a line of inquiry that guides iterative analysis for revealing the situated social practices at play in the classroom:

- Cognitive level: this viewpoint seeks to make visible learners’ understandings outside the classroom and their emerging understandings throughout the study; it draws on observations and other forms of qualitative inquiry to represent how learners conceptualize their own thinking: “researchers ask learners to expose their thinking. Are the explanations clear? Do representations capture important relationships?”
- Interpersonal level: This viewpoint exposes the relational life of the classroom, looking at interactions between teachers and students, and between students; it questions and observes through ethnographic methods the social construction of learning through “sharing of knowledge” and collaboration in learning.
- Group or classroom level: Overlapping with the interpersonal level, this level examines “issues of participant structure, group identity, and authority relationships and questions “Is everyone participating? Is there a sense of the goals and identity of the group?”
- Resource level: This viewpoint considers “what resources are available to learners and if they are easy to understand and use.” While not addressed by researchers, this level could make visible to sociocultural and literacy researchers how students make use of sanctioned and unsanctioned tools.
- Institutional or school level: Researchers looking through this perspective consider the institutional and political structures relevant to the intervention and study. Sociocultural researchers might examine the cultural-historical influences on classroom life including the institutional norms of schooling; the societal structures of class, gender, or race; the circulation (or lack) of cultural capital in the local context. (Collins, Joseph, and Bielaczyc, 2004, p. 35)

These “intertwined” levels of analysis recognize the complexity of learning situations and seek to understand how each level of activity impacts the context as a whole, to avoid isolating understanding but rather to see the connections between phenomena (Collins, Joseph, and Bielaczyc, 2004, p. 35). Like activity theory that necessitates looking to the immediate social context and the extended historical, cultural and institutional one, the design-based research framework orients retrospective analysis at the completion of fieldwork towards looking at the complex and ecological role of activity in socially-situated spaces.

Just as design-based research does not prescribe any single data collection method, it also does not prescribe any single method for data analysis. Rather retrospective analysis in design-based research results from the analytical practices associated with the particular study’s methods (be it quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods). From themes and findings, design-based researchers evaluate the impact of designed interventions on the local learning context and also propose ontological frameworks beyond the local context. For this study, I followed an ethnographic method that analyzed the data through inductive coding with the goal of recognizing the complexity of socially-situated activity.

Data Reduction and Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) refer to a two-step process that starts in the field (through memos and observer comments) and continues in earnest at the completion of field work:

- Data analysis (or data reduction) focuses on managing and organizing data, “breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns”
- Data interpretation focuses on “developing ideas about your findings and relating them to the literature and broader concepts and concerns.” (p. 159)

As researchers finish field work and move into analysis, one ethical threat to the study is the process of data reduction. Smagorinsky (2011) points to the tendency for studies to select data

samples that are “more representative of the author’s preferred conclusion that what the data actually produced about the focus of the study” (p. 249). The caution for researchers in this crucial step is to develop a data analysis and reduction process that avoids verifying preconceived notions but rather tirelessly, exhaustively and systematically search the data for what it truly reveals. Likewise, Brown (1992) warns that researchers may “romanticize research [that selects a few “golden” anecdotes] and rest claims of success on a few engaging anecdotes or particularly exciting transcripts” (p. 173). To avoid the pitfalls of victory narratives, Smagorinsky (2011) calls for a full account of the data reduction process and a “tabulated version of the full analysis” (p. 249). Coding to understand the fullness of the ethnographic record attempts to prevent selecting and misrepresenting samples from the data.

Merriam (2009) defines data analysis as a “complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation” (p. 176). First and foremost, the process requires that the researcher to identify the unit of analysis that will serve as the uniformity between pieces of data and that will permit the researcher to compare data to other data. For socioculturally-situated research, Smagorinsky (2011) notes that the unit of study is the word (in Vygotsky’s terms) or the utterance (in Bakhtin’s):

Understanding a word, or an utterance from Bakhtin’s perspective, thus involves understanding the web of meanings within which it is voiced and understanding the larger social goals that suggest the motivation for and teleological assumptions behind the development of personal, often culturally-channeled goals. (p. 232)

Smagorinsky (2011) goes on to argue that data reduction, coding and interpretation must take into account the theoretical framework that buttresses the study, rather than generic practices outlined in methodology textbooks. Coding strategies must take into account activity as mediated

by social and cultural trajectories and allow researchers to look at activity as contingent on the experiences of the participants and impacted by the wider social scene.

With this study's emphasis on dialogic practices as the potential to destabilize the closed practices of procedural display (stabilized by the discourse of meritocracy and the structures of labeling), data analysis started with an examination of the dialogic patterns in students' negotiation of meaning in the observed class discussions. As a first line of analysis, I attempted to adapt the coding structure used by Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith (1999) to analyze the degree of student participation and engagement in large- and small-group discussions, and in high-, middle- and low-track classes. The study examined how class discussion fostered student's authority in interpreting and responding to literary texts (or more frequently, how teachers took ownership of the interpretive process, leaving students in passive, recipient roles). Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith (1999) define the units of analysis in terms of the dynamics of class discussions as shown in Nystrand and Gamoran's (1990) study that measures dialogic coherence as longer and more sustained responses and more uptake from student to student and from student to teacher:

- The smallest unit of analysis, Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith define as a "communication unit," or a single utterance by a single speaker on a single subject. Measuring the length of communication units from one word to short phrases to longer responses gives insight on the degree of ownership a speaker takes in voicing his or her interpretation or perspective.
- The second unit of analysis, the authors define as a "turn," or the utterances of a single speaker before shifting to a new speaker.
- The third unit of analysis, the authors define as "episodes," or a series of communication units and turns among participants on a single topic (p. 10). Measuring the length of episodes and the number of turns in an episode gives insight on the degree of dialogic interaction; longer episodes with more turns among more students on a single subject might suggest more listening, collaboration and uptake between peers.

After determining the boundaries of each data source (transcripts from observations) as communication units, turns, and episodes, the researchers then coded each unit to group and analyze responses by “linguistic pattern and intellectual content,” which offers analytical insight of who in the classroom did the real work of interpretation and who held control of the discussion. Their codes categorized utterances as follows:

- “Direct,” or an imperative direction to “move others (usually students) toward an action or to shift their attention or the focus on the discussion”
- “Inform,” or a statement that expresses the speaker’s thoughts, knowledge or beliefs
- “Question,” or an invitation for further response
- “Respond,” or a statement or gesture that reciprocates, acknowledges, or evaluates a previous utterance. (p. 11)

What this coding strategy affords Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith’s study is the full tabulation of all discussion data. Coding all utterances in terms of linguistic and intellectual authority on the part of students and teachers in the classroom yields a comparative analysis of agency in the classroom (unfortunately, verifying the fixed patterns of teacher-centered interpretive authority).

For this study, the coding strategy defined by Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith matches the purposes of the study better than the codes themselves. Using units of analysis to mark transcripts and videorecordings of class discussion according to communication units, conversational turns, and episodes will allow me to grapple with and make sense of the data as a whole, and to avoid the tendency to misconstrue data in favor of victory narratives. This accounting of the entire data set speaks to Smagorinsky’s (2011) criticism of work that compresses and misconstrues the full data. As I worked to track dialogic activity across the units of analysis, I looked for longer communication units and sustained episodes with frequent turns

across the class to indicate more activity and agency in discussion, and perhaps heteroglossic tensions as students negotiate meaning, or I will find the opposite.

Open Coding

Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith's (1999) codes (direct, inform, question, respond) offer a starting point for considering the qualities of class discussions, but the purpose to identify interpretational authority suits this study only in part. Taking an inductive and emergent approach to coding, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) recommend that the researcher read through the entire data set at least twice, noting codes before applying any to any units of analysis. Mills and Morton (2013) refer to this stage of analysis as a "way to get to know one's 'data', to begin to make sense of its complexity and decide what aspect of it are meaningful" (p. 119). Starting by recognizing the complexity of the data without preconceived notions affords data analysis in keeping with the emergent understandings of design-based research and with the complexity inherent in recognizing activities mediated in sociocultural contexts. Emerson et al. (2011) defined codes as the effort of to understanding the social scene using the following questions:

- What are people doing? What are they trying to accomplish?
- How, exactly do they do this? What specific means and/or strategies do they use?
- How do members talk about, characterize, and understand what is going on?
- What assumptions are they making?
- What do I see going on here?
- What did I learn from these notes? Why did I include them?
- How what is going on here similar to, or different from, other incidents and events recorded elsewhere in the fieldnotes?
- What is the broader import or significance of this incident or event? What is it a case of? (p. 177)

The complexity of the data comes from recognizing the perspectives of participants and researchers as impacted by their histories and futures within the social space. In this way, the data guides analysis, the local learning context guides theory building. However, I will also (upon completion of identifying codes inductively) follow Smagorinsky's (2011) approach that allows codes to emerge from the theoretical framework. The following codes stem from the critical and dialogic groundings of the study, as established in the research questions, orienting goals for the instructional design, and theoretical framework:

- Authentic identities valued and expressed
- Critique of status quo structures or norms
- Considering alternative stances or perspectives
- Contingent or emergent concepts
- Dialogic tensions encountered/embraced
- Challenging status quo social worlds
- Renegotiating identity

Using the coding and data analysis process to look for signs of identity work connects to the sociocultural approach to analysis that Heath and Street (2008) define as observing language in action. However, they caution researchers to exercise critical inquiry before making assumptions about teens' speech practices in terms of labels and stereotypes:

External labels take on different meanings. Teens deconstruct, ignore, invoke, and reshape their identities through shared interests and joint engagement. How they do this shows up only through close transcription of stretches of language in which they rework stereotypes; position themselves interactionally; and invoke irony, parody, humor to reveal ideas about how to create groups and manage boundaries. (p. 89)

Careful analysis will help researchers makes sense of the inter-relational work of identity construction and renegotiation; only with attention to episodes across the data will researchers

locate co-occurrences that provide insights to how speech patterns convey the reworking of stereotypes.

Mills and Morton (2013) note that many ethnographic researchers find the coding process (informed by Glaser and Strauss's Grounded Theory approach) too scientific with its focus on data, codes and analysis; they advocate more naturalistic forms of inquiry without the guise of an ostensibly objective process. For Mills and Morton, the two approaches do not have to be dichotomous but rather two means to arrive at the same end, full understanding of the research setting, participants and activities.

Axial Coding and Emergent Themes

At the completion of open coding, the process of collapsing codes into categories leads to the emergence of themes in the research study. Merriam (2009) notes a shift from inductive and exploratory thought to deductive and demonstrative thought. The researcher takes a "deductive stance in that [he or she is] looking for more evidence in support of your final set of categories" (p. 183). However, the move to deductive thinking still seeks the significance of the findings. Saldana (2015) refers to categorization as "consolidated meaning" in that "meaning may take the form of a category, theme, concept or assertion, or set in motion a new line of investigation, interpretive thought, or the crystallization of a new theory" (n.p.). In the deductive process of supporting the emergent themes with episodes from the data collection still arises emergent understandings. Saldana notes that very few researchers land on the scheme for categorization on the first effort, and so new understandings about the social scene come to light through new categorization schemes and new emergent themes.

Design Evaluation and Theory Generation

For both ethnography and design-based research, the end goal is the development of new theories of learning. Beyond themes and categories, the study should add to our understandings of how to best orient the social scene of the classroom in ways that afford our students the opportunities to grow and develop. Reinking and Bradley (2008) note that researchers, in evaluating the effectiveness of an intervention, must look across different levels to understand how the goal of the intervention impact different participants within the scene, much like Collins, Joseph, and Bielaczyc's (2004) framework for retrospective analysis, which asks researchers to look at the impact of the instructional design at the cognitive, interpersonal, classroom, resource and institutional levels. From understanding the design across these levels at the local context comes the possibility of generating theory.

Chapter Summary

The real potential in teachers engaging in design-based research is the ongoing to hope to “pose, wobble and flow” towards classroom spaces that allow students to do the same. O'Donnell-Allen and Garcia point to urgency of teachers taking the risk of reorienting their classrooms toward safe spaces of critical inquiry in face of the widening inequalities in our society, spaces where students enter realizing that the space is free from the discourses of risk, remediation and meritocracy endemic to most experiences of schooling. In a shared cultural space, students take ownership of the space, the norms of the space, identities constructed in the space and literacies performed in the space. This study is a first “vulnerable” wobble as I ,become “relentlessly curious and open to change, [as I am] compelled to experiment, risk failure, and persist through difficulty to deepen [my] understanding” (O'Donnell-Allen & Garcia, 2015, p. 36). And as I ask my students to do the same.

In the design of this study, I attempted to set the context for an authorial space that calls into questions the cultural trajectories that underlie procedural display and that establishes the setting for substantive engagement. Drawing on dialogic literacy practices that nurture authenticity, collaborative *and* discordant negotiation of meaning, and the renegotiation of the school's telos. Adapting ethnographic tools to observe the social scene of my classroom, I looked for complex and nuanced understandings of how students take to, take up and resist the changes in class activity. Design-based research affords the ontological tools of analysis to observe and innovate through the cycles of design, each innovation one step closer (hopefully) to the "buzzing, blooming confusion of real-life settings where most learning actually occurs" (Barab and Squire, 2004, p. 4).

Chapter 5: Findings

As the course of this study moved from the promising month of April to the exhausting last month of May, I found myself as researcher and teacher experiencing moments of anguish and frustration as well as moments of epiphany and elation. So much in my classroom went against the carefully devised design, in ways both troubling and revealing. But through it all, my students (as much as possible at the end of a long junior year) took to the curriculum centered on teenage life in America in thought-provoking ways. As my students grappled with the nature of identity and the ways that societal structures impede or enable identity construction through (mostly) dialogic activity, I found that giving students time and space to voice what it means to be a teenager proved a worthwhile undertaking, even if the day-to-day design of the intervention often yielded results far short of the critical inquiry I had hoped for. Returning again and again to the research questions that guided the study, I attempted to interrogate the ways that schooling in America promotes a hierarchical structure that often positions students and social groups against each other in a constant and competitive rank and file:

- How do labels influence the [lack of] opportunities that teachers enact for dialogic inquiry, and how do labels influence students' [un]willingness to engage in dialogic inquiry?
- How do students act on identities inferred from these labels? How do labels impact students' attitudes towards school and the identities they exert in school?
- How can dialogic literacy practices help in destabilizing tracked labels and renegotiating identities for more participatory classrooms?

In interviews, writing samples and in participant interviews, I heard my students contending with an educational system that expects perfection, that demands academic excellence often at the exclusion of all other ways of being, and that leaves many students feeling less than. For many of my students, the chance to express the pressures and anxieties they feel in the penultimate year

of high school became almost cathartic. At the end of almost every interview, I felt that most students just want to be recognized as more than a number or a score. Again and again students expressed the way that the gauntlet of competitive schooling reduced pathways of participation to one: earning points on omnipotent transcripts.

During the course of the study, I revisited again and again to the goals of dialogic pedagogy to devise literacy events with the potential to move classroom discourse beyond the omnipresent power of grades and ranks, that would open multiples paths of participation:

- Sanction multifaceted literacies and competencies and make connections between the social worlds in school and those outside of school – recognize the ways that students build identities and competencies outside the classroom and schoolhouse.
- Emphasize critical literacy skills that position reading, dialogue, and writing as the potential to challenge status quo assumptions about identities and identity construction.
- Practice perspective-taking for alternative stances on beliefs, understandings, and readings that permits critical thinking, in that students acknowledge and respect divergent stances and experiences even as their own perspectives may remain unaltered.
- Inspire free-ranging, carnivalesque and substantive engagement through dialogic inquiry with texts, with peers, and with self.

But as the course of the study progressed, I noticed a significant incongruence between the open inquiry students expressed in their writing and also in one-on-one interviews with me, and the perfunctory or even antagonistic discourse across social groups. Their reticence to share ideas and experiences with students outside the comfort zone of like-minded peers felt palpable throughout the entire study. One of the most frustrating aspects of the study seemed to result from my inability to hone in on a discussion format that would permit the type of contingent perspective-taking that encourages participants to embrace tensions and conflicts, in positive ways. The divides between students seemed so markedly drawn that I sometimes found myself unable to get students to switch groups. Always a class with polarized social groups, the class

had engaged in substantive class discussion throughout the school year, but there is something about the personal nature of this unit, the very immediacy of looking at identity construction in books with teenage protagonists that drew the lines between social groups more intransigently than ever.

Pedagogical Challenges Elucidated Three Themes as Obstacles to Dialogic Exchange

In evaluating the instructional design over the course of the unit and reflecting on the lessons learned at the end of the unit, it was this difference between what students expressed in writing and what they hesitated to express in discussion that affirmed for me the powerful nature of social positioning – the positions students take up because of institutional norms and the social practices through which students position one another and are positioned by one another. Harre, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart & Sabat (2009) refer to the interchange between institutional and social forces as “prepositioning” or presupposed assumptions about a person’s social role or actions based on “local and even idiographic implicit/explicit practices implying powers, abilities, or status levels which support ascriptions of duties; and vulnerabilities, incapacitations, social deficits, which, in turn, support rights-ascriptions and claims” (p. 10). Across social divides, students seem to preposition one another based on the readily-recognized institutional labels, and these prepositional assumptions prove stubbornly resistant to repositioning. The successes and failures of this unit seem to hinge on the ways that students were able or not able to move around and beyond limiting positional identities, and to express their frustrations with social positioning. For me, these difficulties elucidated the obstacles to dialogic activity in a social environment predicated on such intransigent labeling and positioning. How can teachers short-circuit the powerful forces of competitive schooling? As I transcribed, coded, and analyzed the mountains of data collected in this study (eleven interviews, nineteen small group

discussions, eight whole-group discussions, over a hundred writing samples), I identified these themes as the obstacles stemming from institutional and social forces that inhibit dialogic activity, but I still see the promise of engaging in these pedagogies through students feeling recognized beyond their academic positions:

- Theme 1 – Social stratifications as an obstacle to dialogic activity and engagement.
- Theme 2 – Resistance to flattening hierarchies – the difficulty of “(re)doing school” outside the competition of performance measures (the chain of assignments, grades, GPAs)
- Theme 3 – The value of challenging obstacles, of still attempting to create spaces for inquiry and self-expression to mediate academic positioning.

In keeping with the intention of design-based research to go beyond local pedagogy to ontology, I plan to explore what I have learned from my students, and their experiences of schooling, in the hopes of developing a new way of thinking about teaching in highly competitive classrooms. First I would like to set the stage by looking closely at one video-recorded discussion, to consider how students navigate stratified social worlds.

“I have something to say”: An introductory look at social exchanges and (attempted) dialogic activity across a whole-class discussion on David Levithan’s *Everyday*

It’s seventh period on Tuesday April 12, the end of the second day back from spring break; the days slowly ticking toward summer break seem to show on students – their bent postures from overloaded packs and course loads, their exhaustion from the mounting pressures as junior year nears the end, anxiety felt palpably from choices made through three years of high, choices now impacting the paths they will take after senior year. But on this particular day, the first students meander into room 303, nearly running right into desks arranged in a large circle

around the perimeter of the room, trying to figure out what the class may have planned for the day – they were supposed to have a quiz, so they question a classroom arranged for discussion.

Two students stop at the door, weigh their options and take seats as close as possible in the circle to the rowed desks where they normally sit. There in the back corner of the room, Bryan and Hannah, laughingly debate the merits of the book *Everyday* by David Levithan, a young adult novel that students have just finished reading. Their conversation centers on Rhiannon, one of the main characters, and it starts as a joke, the pronunciation of her name, and the way she makes sense of A's strange existence body-jumping from one teenage life to the next. But Xavier – a student whose social standing and reputation among his peers seems to hinge on the degree to which he can turn almost anything into an ironic joke – takes a seat near them, and he loudly proclaims that he *actually* read the book, that he *actually* liked the book. The surprise in his voice comes from what I think is students' expectation that anything they have to read for Lit/Comp will be a drudgery, a chore to be endured. But Xavier also quickly follows this proclamation with another, that his grade in the class is a 69, and that he needs to bring up his grade, suggesting that the distance between real engagement and academic performance never seems to stray far. Students may enjoy a book or an activity, but perhaps only if it coincides with a good grade.

Xavier, in a social negotiation that may have as much to do with academic positioning as friendship, loudly claims Bryan as his partner in the activity to come. "I trust Bryan, I choose Bryan," Xavier says. Xavier's choice of Bryan, a focused and articulate student in the class, for the partner activity that will precede discussion, points to the way students recognize and rank each other according to academic levels; these academic ranks seem to mediate most social activities – friend groups, social activities, group collaborations.

With the warning bell signaling that class will begin in two minutes, more students enter and more seats in the circle start to fill. And these social negotiations that underlie almost every moment of high school life begin to take on a more fevered pitch. Faith enters, pauses at the door, surveying the terrain and considering her options; she finds Abigail, her friend and constant collaborator in the class. Her movements take on direct purpose and she moves quickly to claim the desk next to Abigail and Nathan. The energy in the room begins to feel more like the last moments in a game of musical chairs. Xavier's friends Eric and Zachary arrive after all the desks in their corner of the room are filled; they drag unneeded desks stacked in the middle of the circle to Xavier's corner, creating an outward-facing abscess on the inward-facing discussion circle. Xavier notes that the circle is "no longer a circle," but he still tells Eric to "just do it." Their reconstruction of the circle from communal to insular hints at their unwillingness to take seats apart from their usual group and also hints at the social stratifications at play in the class – students stridently resist working and conversing with anyone but like-minded peers.

Jordon, one of the highest-achieving students in the class, enters the room, weighed down by a heavy backpack and a gym bag for track practice after school. He walks past desks near his typical friend group, no empty desks there; he looks around and takes a seat on the opposite side of the room, near students with whom he rarely interacts, students whose academic levels and identities differ greatly from his own. For Jordan, it seems that every interaction in the class relates directly to the grade he needs to earn, to the A he has assiduously maintained all year. Thus he typically works only with students that maintain the same singular focus. But not today. On the video footage collected of this afternoon, Jordan looks from peers in his social group across the room to those students where he sits today, and he looks from the agenda on the board at the front of the room then back at his peers across the room and again at the students sitting

next to him. His expression neutral, he says not a word, but it would seem he goes through the mental calculations of what this class period will require of him and what impact it might make on his grade. For students like Jordan, the mental strain of remaining an A student in every class, many of the classes AP or honors, means that there is no space for exertion outside of a grade, perhaps no purpose for classroom activity unless it plays a direct bearing on his grade, and by extension his GPA. The problem comes when this highly performative engagement stratifies the class into barely conversant social groups.

In the last few moments before class, the last few students enter the room to find only an empty desk here or there. They stand in the middle of the room, waiting, practically refusing to take a seat away from their usual social groups, despite the eight months that this group of students have been together as a class. Dylan and David wait, and I point out the empty desks, that they reluctantly occupy. As I circulate the room distributing the discussion preparation activity that I have called a reading quiz, I ask pairs of students sitting next to each other if they are working together. Those sitting next to companionate peers – David and Sierra, Caroline and Allison, Abigail and Faith – supply a ready affirmation, but students joined by chance just look at one another, both students hesitant to affirm a partnership, even for the fifteen minutes this activity will occupy.

To me, this hesitancy *could* just be about friendship; of course high school students, or really anyone, would prefer to work with their friends. But in this highly-stratified class and school with readily-defined social groups (athletes and the in-crowd, musicians and skaters, goths and geeks, these labels reminiscent of a John Hughes' movie but still visibly problematic in their prevalent influence on students' perceptions of one another), it also seems that highly-tracked academic levels play out in the way that students tend toward myopia in their inability to

see their peers outside of the labels they manifest. Erikson (1950) theorizes that in their identity formation practices, teens define self in relation to their view of others. Through social negotiation, teens begin to identify who they are through affiliations and differences. In particular, teens judge other social groups harshly, a form of “intolerance as a defense against a sense of identity confusion” (Erikson, 1950, p. 262). This intolerance for divergent peers as a form of self-definition impedes nuanced identity construction and thus ever more fixes students into stratified social groups. Initiated by institutional norms and perpetuated by peer divides, these social stratifications greatly influence the ways that teens construct and perform identities. As I observed the social interactions playing out in my classroom, it seemed to me that that the institution of education provides the bricks and mortar in the form of labels and hierarchies, and students build the dividing walls ever higher and higher, making it more and more impossible to even see over the walls that divide peer groups.

In this hierarchical field of high school life, it would seem – and I felt through most of the course of the study – that there is little hope for common ground or understanding, that dialogic possibility for making meaning across social divides is more of an impossibility. But on April 12, the discussion circle showed also some flickering glimmers of hope, that students – given the opportunity to discuss their lives – *can* hear one another, *can* collaborate to make meaning across that gulf of social stratification. The partner activity that students completed became the starting point for a whole class discussion on the ways that Levithan’s novel effectively or ineffectively exemplifies the lives of teens in America today (see Appendix E for discussion prep activity and samples of student work). In the first moments of the discussion, Xavier raises the issue of family lives as shown in the novel through the experiences of two characters, Owen and Leslie Wong. The discussion that follows starts with tentative turn-taking but slowly shifts toward a

more collaborative exchanges of ideas, connecting with Bakhtin's (1984) premise that one utterance yields another, leading toward the co-construction of understanding; it becomes, at moments, a fairly rich transaction with the text, and between students raising different perspectives on the ways teens navigate social worlds of school and home:

- MS. BOWEN – What I am hoping is that you can talk about different characters who revealed and exemplified something important about teenage life in America, and bringing it back to the author's purpose. Was the author successful showing what it means to be a teenager in America today? Who wants to start? (1)
- XAVIER – I will (*murmurs*) I don't know. What do you want me to do? (*some laughter*) (2)
- MS. BOWEN – Pick a block to start our conversation. Which one did you guys write about? (3)
- XAVIER – Uhm, family issues... Basically what we were about was that Owen's parents were quick to dismiss him as a drug dealer when they first heard that he was. They didn't think to go to him to ask him, well, was he? Did he do it? and I think that is pretty accurate. If my parents got a call that I was a drug dealer, they would believe it without a second thought. (4)
- Some laughter and murmurs, one loud "Dang"*
- MS. BOWEN – Ok, so with what Xavier said, do you feel like parents are more suspicious that they need to be? Do you feel that is true of a lot of parents? (5)
- Lots of murmurs and response with students discussing with neighboring peers, on topic but not hearing one another*
- MS. BOWEN – OK, everybody, hang on, you guys are going to have to figure out how to moderate each other, how to give someone the floor so everyone can hear, so let's go Hannah then Nathan. (6)
- Nathan raises his head and looks in both directions, startled that his comment to his neighbor Abigail will go public. Some laughter, some murmurs.*
- HANNAH – Uhm, wait are you talking about – (*pause, unsure of what is expected of her*) so I was saying that it depends on who they were and what they grew up around. They were at a school that (7)

maybe was not that great, and maybe they weren't that great, and they were around a lot of drug dealers, and maybe it was easier to jump to conclusions

NATHAN – Well, what I was saying before was that Xavier's response about his parents thinking he could be a drug dealer, my parents wouldn't do that. They would just murder me (*some laughter*), but I think it shows that being a teenager is really difficult. Any little threat, your parents won't try to figure out who you are, they will just believe whatever they hear. (*long pause*) I don't have anything else to say. Popcorn anyone? (8)

Some laughter, "Popcorn is good"

MS. BOWEN – Y'all will figure this out in just a second. It's ok (9)

XAVIER – Well, David had his hand up (10)

DAVID – I raised my hand? (*some laughter*) (11)

In this part of the discussion, students at first hesitate to deviate from their discussion preparation assignment, relating to the degree to which so much of class discussion in literature classes masquerades as comprehension checks, more akin to teacher-centered knowledge verification rather than student-centered knowledge construction. The problem with overly-scaffolded discussion preparation as a form of text review and remediation is that it compromises the sort of exploratory talk that dialogic work strives for, acculturating students to the idea that they should only speak in "final draft" form, always knowing the supposed right answer (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 85; Beach, Thein, and Parks; 2007). If students are expected to know the right answer at the beginning of the discussion, then what would even be the purpose for discussion? The prevalence of class discussion that attempts dialogic exchange but more enacts a form of procedural display means that students may hesitate to actually speak what is on their minds, that they see discussion as the last place for matters meaningful and important (Bloome, Puro and Theodorou, 1989).

In a later interview with Bryan, a perceptive and articulate student who works hard in an effort to overcome what he calls some mistakes from freshman year but who also embodies an easy-going attitude about the gauntlet of competitive schooling, I asked him about students' reluctance to speak in class discussion, and he agreed that students may want to speak up but do not; he attributed this hesitance to the antagonistic relationship between teachers and students (made combative over assessment and grades), and the competitive relationship between students. This reticence shows in the way students read from the handout, attempting to fulfill the pre-established rules of the assignment and perhaps no more. However, the relevance of the young adult novel to teens' lives does open a small door to the potential for students to discuss real issues in real ways. In the next segment of conversation, Caroline introduces the character Kelsea Cook who struggles with severe depression and suicidal ideation (still in a rather perfunctory and reticent utterance). There follows a palpable pause in the room, a hesitancy that seems to come from the idea that school is not the place to talk about tough issues; however, the discussion begins to build toward a sense of substantive honesty as students begin to articulate the things they never talk about at school, the students dealing with anxiety and depression:

CAROLINE – (*raising her hand*) I have something to say, we did a different character. We did Kelsea Cook, and we just said that her mom left her when she was really young and she and her dad don't seem that close, like her dad does not seem to know that she is suicidal and that seems like a family issue. (1)

Long pause

MS. BOWEN – Do you guys feel like that is true, that your parents do not seem to know what is going on with you? If you were in a situation and I hope that would not be true that you would be in such a desperate situation and your parents would not know. Do you think your parents are in tune with what you are going through? (2)

Several hands go up, pretty quickly.

MS. BOWEN – I don't know who goes first, so let's just start over here and then to Joel. So David and then Sierra and then Jordan. (3)

DAVID – Well, I think the thing is that parents do not always know what is going on with teens, the things that may not be stressful to the adult. The teens could be going through a lot of things that are stressing them out, because of their jobs and things. And they say don't worry about it. But these things are adding pressure, and that could lead to unfortunate, not accidents... (4)

DR. PEART – Actions. (5)

DAVID – Actions, yeah. (6)

SIERRA – Yeah, I mean that does happen a lot, I mean communication is important. You actually have to talk to your parents, though sometimes they may do really irrational things. Like I have heard of people who have said something to their parents and their parents have like put them in a hospital, which is the opposite of what some of us want. So ya know it may just make it worse for the kid, so that is not really going to help. Yeah, so a lot of us may just try to shove that back, and not talk to their parents at all. So that is not really a healthy relationship. But if that is your only option, well I guess that is what you've got. (7)

Long pause

MS. BOWEN – Yeah. *(pause)* Jordan? (8)

JORDAN – Yeah, I guess it shows that parents do not really understand the stress that teens have. They just think that we don't have responsibilities really. And uh, I guess that a lot of times teens don't talk to their parents about it at all. So I guess it kinda shows... *(his voice fades off, he also makes a short swiping away gesture as if he is wiping away what he has said)* (9)

Even though Caroline's utterance starts in a rather perfunctory way, her courage and honesty in raising the difficult topic results in more students building on her thinking, with utterances lengthening and deepening as students begin to open up about the real problems of parent-teen relationships. However, that dialogic momentum is just as quickly diminished. The discussion that started to pick up some energy falters again; Jordan's visible reluctance to fully finish his

thought shows in his quiet voice, the descending volume the longer he talks. His visible reticence seems to remind the group that this is Lit/Comp class, not a place for real conversation that might expose them to the very peers with whom they compete for social status and academic rank.

In this discussion of Levithan's *Everyday*, I observed the challenges that students face in negotiating institutional norms and social positioning -- and that sometimes censors which selves they reveal in class discussion, which selves that they keep silent and selves they sometimes reveal in their writing, and which selves they hide until the bell rings at 3:30 each day.

**Theme 1 - Social Stratifications, Influenced by Institutional Norms,
as an Obstacle to Dialogic Activity and Engagement**

In a social world as stratified as Pruitt High School tends to be, students seem to view most classroom interactions through a lens of comparison and competition, affiliation and difference. Their willingness to transact with peers must first filter through a mental map of how peers and groups view one another. These preconceived notions of social position often preclude the types of dialogic activity that can result in transformative thinking. More than just conversation, the real goal of dialogic activity comes in the ability to embrace contingencies and to confront tensions in ways that do not allow hegemonic thinking to go unchecked. In a collaborative environment, peers can question and challenge one another in ways that do not threaten or alienate (Beach, Parks, Thein, & Lensmire, 2003). This can be the hardest part of dialogic activity to encourage for two reasons: students may not feel invested enough in the reading or topic to challenge an idea they disagree with, or students may disagree in argumentative but not collaborative ways, resulting in tensions that only escalate and not elucidate. Those disagreements may also reveal more about the social strata at play in the space, with students taking sides along readily-formed lines of demarcation.

To begin, I would like to return to the April 12 whole-class discussion on Levithan's *Everyday*. Conversation in the middle of the discussion returned to the subject of Kelsea Cook, a chapter most students found of central importance for its visceral imagery of a teenager in a suicidal crisis. As students began to weigh in on issues of mental illness for teenagers, a confrontation emerged related to the varying ways that society views mental illness, and the confrontation revealed the ways the social stratifications can play into unproductive tensions in dialogic activity:

RYAN – So we picked Kelsea Cook to look at emotional and psychological issues, which she clearly does. So it kinda shows insight that life, teenage life is not as easy as parents might think it is, because they are born in a different age, and this is a newer generation, and a lot of things change and parents don't realize that. I think that is especially shown in Kelsea Cook's case where like, where no one really understands her, so it shows a lot of insight into that, kind of like... (*diminuendo then long pause*) (1)

MS. BOWEN – Zachary (*responding to a raised hand*) (2)

ZACHARY – Well, I felt like, uhm, the reason that people don't understand her is that she doesn't want people to understand her, because she is always like pushing people out. She always tries to avoid people instead of trying to know people, because there are people that come up to her and say 'hi' but she is always distant or she tries to avoid them (3)

Pause

MS. BOWEN – (quietly) That's interesting (4)

HANNAH – (*she starts talking very quietly but gains volume as she takes the floor*) Well, it says at the beginning that she is insecure so it might be a sense of abandonment, because like her mom left her. So if you take that into consideration, it might be her fear of people leaving her, or she could just be insecure that people won't like her so she won't give them a chance. (5)

The first interchanges align with a single social group; Ryan, Hannah and Zachary are all high-achieving students but with a mostly balanced attitude in regards to the pressures toward

academic competition; they frequently work together, and their comments build on each other in collaborative ways. And then the discussion shifts to a second social group; Savannah, Sierra, David, and Angela are part of the school's growing countercultural social group – skaters, rockers, artists. In this seventh period class, there is a palpable antagonism between this social group who wear blue and green hair as a mark of rebellion and rejection of the school's predominant “basic” culture -- the athletes and academics. Many students, of course, move between these social groups, but in this class, the wall between these groups seems to impact almost every interaction and discussion. As the discussion continues, Savannah, a student who deals with acute anxiety, voices tentatively her view of the character Kelsea Cook:

SAVANNAH – (*very quietly, almost inaudible*) it might be anxiety (1)

MS. BOWEN – Explain (2)

SAVANNAH – Anxiety? (3)

MS. BOWEN – Yeah, what might anxiety be doing to Kelsea, because Zachary was saying that, if you look at that as a reason why she might be pushing people away? Why would the anxiety lead her to push people away? (4)

Pause

MS. BOWEN – And you don't have to take that, anybody could answer. (5)

SIERRA – Ok, I guess I will answer. It could easily be a combination of things. It could be social anxiety and also a fear of people leaving her, because if you are scared people are going to leave you, you don't want to give them a shot at all. Well, you are going to leave anyway so I don't see a point. So I mean that happens with friends, that happens with relationships. That happens with like everything. And over time you get kind of used to it, but at the same time and especially in a state like that, where she was really at her breaking point, it might get a little worse, and come to her more prominently like it did with the journal and all of that. (6)

MS. BOWEN – David, I think I skipped you a minute ago, so David and then Angela. (7)

- DAVID – Ok, I think Sierra covered a lot of what I was going to say, and it might be that she might be really depressed. People help with depression, [but] people might need help in different ways. Some people like to be joking about it; some people might talk, laugh, have a good time. Other people will shut people off and hide in their rooms for days because they think that no one cares. And when someone comes up to them, they think no way, there is no way this person cares. That is probably why she shuts them off. (8)
- MS. BOWEN – So she is already past the point where someone can get to her? (9)
- DAVID – Yeah. (10)
- MS. BOWEN – Angela? (11)
- ANGELA – I think she fears the effects of telling other people about it. (12)
- MS. BOWEN – Oh, explain. (13)
- ANGELA – Like everybody can react one way or another, like when she was going to tell her dad that she wants to kill herself, he is going to be either like do nothing to help or he'll say, 'well we'll send you to an institution.' Like she may just have negative ideas, and she may just be super-scared of telling him [about] what is going on with her. And she probably thinks that she can manage on her own, so she doesn't *need* help from other people. (14)
- MS. BOWEN – What do you guys wish that parents knew about how to deal with those situations? What would be the better way for parents to deal, as opposed to jumping to that conclusion? Cecause a couple of you have said that. So what would be the thing that the kid in crisis needs? (15)
- DAVID – Parents should talk to their kids not just instantly try to find a solution because some problems don't have a solution immediately. Some problems just need a chance to talk about it, and then they may just go away by that alone. Some people just want to talk; some people may just have stress that they need to release; some people may need help, so that is when you need to find a solution, not just jump to the conclusion that they may need to go to an institute or should go see someone for their problems. (16)
- MS. BOWEN – Xavier? (17)

XAVIER – I think the parents should do nothing, and the kid should just buck up and find a solution to their problems. (18)

Pause and then as students register what he has said shocked laughter around the room. (19)

CAROLINE – (to Allison and Dr. Peart) That is awful. (20)

Lots of individual conversations break out around the room in reaction.

Xavier's comment about people with mental illness draws an immediate and stunned reaction. At this point twenty-five minutes into the discussion, Xavier may just be attempting to get a rise out of the group. Trading in irony and iconoclasm is part of Xavier's personality; he tends to do whatever it takes to get his peers shocked, awed... and laughing. However, many students in the room did not take lightly his comment questioning the validity of mental illness. The room had erupted into many side conversations, and I think it is these moments that frighten many teachers from talking about "real" issues. Teachers worry that students will take offense to opinions different from their own. Students in my class for the most part know how to handle disagreements about race, class, or other hot-button social issues. But giving the appearance of listening and the kind of listening inherent in dialogic activity are two very different things; my students know the rules of civic discussion – that everyone gets to be heard, that differences of opinion are simply that, and that discussions must stay on the discussions of those opinions, and not stray to personal attacks. This my students are good at. *Really* listening and *really* hearing another person's opinion, not so much.

MS. BOWEN – (trying to deal with the reaction from the class) Well, I think that is a real perception in society that you can just suck it up. That is a real perception. So how do we deal with that perception? A lot of people, a lot of parents may have that perception. They may think, oh if you just put on a smile and put on a brave face, then you'll be fine, but with what we know about depression and anxiety, and the changes in the brain, the chemistry of the

brain, the structure of the brain, that's really not possible. So who was first? Are you guys first?

SIERRA – Yeah, from a neurological basis, mental illness is just illness of the brain, and everyone knows that the brain is the most important organ in the body. It is one of those ones that you can't live without, until they work out brain transplants, so you can't just replace it and go on like you could with other things. And you know, it is a real problem. A lot of mental disorders are chemical deficiencies, or an overabundance of a certain thing. There are medicines that help with that but there are also a lot of terrible side effects. There is nothing that really cures it, so you are just going to have to push through it. There are things that help, but if people don't get help, it could lead to really bad outcomes. But they may need some help, but there are sometimes that there is really nothing that you can do, other than just talking to the person and making sure that they are having a better day.

ANGELA – I feel like you can't really suck it up all the time. Like unless you go through depression, you are not going to know what it feels like. You are not going to know what it feels like to be in the same state that they are. So some days it may be super easy to suck it up, but some days it may be really hard to. Like I feel like as a parent you would need to be accepting of it and not lash out at your kids for saying this. And telling them to suck it up would not really help. Your child would think, oh ok, you are telling me to suck it up, so they are going to take it in a negative way. They are not going to tell you how they feel ever again.

Sierra and Angela confront the misconceptions inherent in Xavier's comment in articulate and direct ways, offering both rational and emotional refutations. They offer alternate perspectives without the confrontational tenor that precludes any sort of open-minded reconsideration. So I did see hope in the way students in the discussion stood up and argued the fallacies in Xavier's comment, but I also worried that their utterances went unheard and unheeded. In our schools, and really in our society at large, it would seem that people talk, but only hear the perspectives that match their own. People often do not really hear across ideological divides. As society goes, so do our schools. It seems that it is harder and harder for students to hear each other, especially others with divergent experiences and opinions. In this one discussion, I saw some reasons for

hope – that students could speak so eloquently of their perspectives and interpretation, but I saw just as many reasons for concern that the divides between students means they hear little from students outside their insular circles of peers. The walls between students grow ever higher and harder to shout over.

False Binary of “Basics” and “Alternative Kids” – How Identity Construction Can Ironically Contribute to Social Stratification

Social positioning leads students to affiliate and agree with those in their social circles and to repel and repudiate peers outside those social circle; this positioning further inhibits the types of dialogic activity where students can transact over ideas, sharing and modifying perspectives. Despite four or five distinct social groups playing out in the classroom space, students drew affiliations between groups who mostly align with the school’s predominant culture of athletics and academics (the so-called basics) and groups who mostly rebel against that dominant culture (the so-called alternative kids). The image of those divisive circles is not too far removed from the exaggerated cafeteria scene in the film *Mean Girls* (2004). As two characters lay out the social hierarchy to Cady, a girl new to high school life, she comes face-to-face with a space divided into almost-militarized zones for various stereotypical friend groups: “preps, Asian nerds, Cool Asians, Band Geeks, Jocks and Plastics.” At the beginning of the unit, students viewed the video clip, and I asked them to reflect on the ways that the social worlds at Pruitt are either similar to or different from the divided cliques in teen films. In discussion, students came to a general consensus that life at Pruitt mostly differs from the film, that students at Pruitt regularly crossed social borders even though friend groups may be fairly defined. They argued that the divides between races and ethnicities, as well as the hierarchical divides between

popularity and unpopularity were nothing more than a pop culture trope, so exaggerated from real life that it barely relates to reality.

Following the discussion, students also wrote a short reflective journal, and these journals reflect a different perspective. Of the fifteen journals submitted, six students diverged from the opinions asserted in the discussion and agreed that Pruitt is just as divided as the high school in *Mean Girls*, six students stood with the discussion's consensus, that students regularly crossed social barriers, and three students refuted the idea that barriers even existed at all. Paradoxically, the journal about social stratification reveals the degree to which these divides impact the potential for dialogic activity in the classroom undermined by these social divides. In his journal, Bryan notes, "students often don't like to admit that they don't hang out with certain crowds, but there is still a separation between friend groups [that] is usually unspoken where it is easily spoken in media among students." Bryan, a student with remarkable perspicacity (he articulated the relationship between students and teachers being more like a war than a collaboration), notes the divide as "unspoken," as an unacknowledged divide between social groups. Like the insidious danger of microaggressions, the idea that the divide goes unacknowledged seems to make it all the more divisive.

The class also considered the impact of social stereotypes of high school life in parallel with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2009) experiences from her *TED Talk* "Dangers of Single Story." The goal of the discussion started with the idea to compare the way stereotypes play out in teen movies like *Mean Girls* (2004), *The Breakfast Club* (1985), *High School Musical* (2006), and so on with the way these representations reduce the complexity of teen identity in real life, much in the same way that Adichie felt that her American university peers expected her, as a Nigerian, to be a famine-starved, tribal-raised woman, rather than as she was, quite similar to

them. According to Adichie, “the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story” (12:56). From divergent social groups, Faith and Angela wrote the following journal entries acknowledging the problem of stereotyping but also affirming its inevitability:

Part of these stereotypes are pop culture and part are true. These stereotypes first had to come from something that was true but quickly strayed to something more. In our high school, we often face the same stereotypes shown in movies because that’s what teens assume to be true. We have the cliques of jocks and nerds and band geeks and popular girls, and I can’t help but wonder if it was shown differently in movies that we would act differently in real life. Stereotypes didn’t just come to be; they may have been created by one group, but not everyone who looks as they do acts like they do. (Faith, Writing Sample, April 15)

I think [the affluent area of the suburban county surrounding the school] influenced the way people think and act at Pruitt. A lot of the students who go to Pruitt dress, look and act the same way. I think Pruitt has its social cliques, but they’re different. You have the basics which are 99% of the school. Then you have the alternative kids. These kids are the nerds, punk kids, and all the other kids who go to Pruitt who don’t follow the crowd. The basics are more like the really somewhat popular people who don’t know that they are carbon copies of each other. (Angela, Writing Sample, April 15)

Both Angela and Faith, despite their affiliations with widely divergent friend groups, hint at the way stereotypes transmit distorted views of teens across opposing social circles. For Faith who mostly affiliates with the in-crowd of students highly involved in academics and athletics, those stereotypes derive from pop culture, the movies that reinforce these highly reductive views of teen identity. For Angela who mostly identifies with the countercultural group of alternative students, those stereotypes take root in the community’s affluence and the way economic status flattens identity into these two opposing social groups – the “basics” and the “alternative kids.” While this false binary reduces the complexity of the school’s social worlds (with many students moving between peer groups), the dichotomy does hold some bearing on why students pigeonhole one another into these opposing groups, and how they themselves simultaneously

feel pigeonholed.

For Angela, she expresses her identity as proudly and unequivocally alternative, as the counterpoint to the basics that she sees as “carbon copies”: her blue hair, dark clothes, and expressive make-up she describes as an essential part of her emergent identity. In an interview, she recalled the first time she dyed her hair as a moment of transformation when she left one identity behind and took on another, breaking up with her former self:

I used to be like super anxious all the time, and then once I really dyed my hair. I really figured out who I was. Then as people kept like complimenting me and stuff, it gave me the boost that I needed... When I decided to dye my hair blue, it was like I created a new identity for myself. Like I really changed after that, before I had gone through like so much in my life that like I really needed to change and kind of like broke up with who I was... So, when I had blonde hair, I was super shy and I was really timid and not even that, I used to be really awkward. Then once I dyed my hair blue, it was the start of like my new self and my new identity. (Angela, Participant Interview, April 13)

For Angela, it was her feeling of congruence between her inner and outer selves that that made her feel more secure and empowered. In class discussions, she eloquently and persuasively speaks her point of view on literature and social issues. In fact, I would never have guessed from her outspoken demeanor that she could have been a student too shy to speak up in class. Knowing that she continued to find her voice in my class made me see much potential in devoting time and space for class discussion on topics important to teens. But paradoxically, the secure sense of self expressed by Angela and her friend group (David, Sierra, Elyse, Reagan, Savannah) seems to enact an even more divisive climate in the classroom and school. Perhaps because of Pruitt’s rather homogenous student body, an oppositional culture arises, an us-versus-them mentality in which students seem to frequently identify and position themselves as the opposite social group, both groups feeling judged and neither acknowledging the judging.

Thus, as much as Angela feels that the “basics” ostracize her social group and see her

identity in distorted ways, Faith feels the same, expressing the ways she feels judged as “basic.” In a writing event borrowed from McClure’s (2017) dissertation on identity and motivation, Faith and other students constructed “I Am Not” poems (in prose or verse) to acknowledge and challenge the ways they feel misperceived or stereotyped in the social field of school or outside of school. In the production of the poems, students struggled: they worried what to write and how to write it: they worried how they would be perceived in the social environment of the classroom. Of course, sharing the poems was my original intent, but students became so paralyzed by the idea that they would be forced to share their poems that I relented – the last thing I wanted was for them to censor their thoughts and ideas. I allowed students to share only with self-selected small groups, which became groups of affiliated friends. Their reticence to write and in turn share suggests the pervasive nature of social positioning as performance – even as students challenge in their writing the positioning that feels inauthentic to the way they view themselves, they hesitate to challenge that position publicly, and perhaps even affirming those positions through their reluctance to publicly challenge them. They may realize that the social space expects them to remain in that position, to perform that identity, or they may lack the options to shift or negotiate that position in the social sphere. In the poems that students produced, they took on a number of positionings – academic, hierarchical, cultural, gendered, and their work showed the great need of allowing students the opportunity to renegotiate identity and positioning.

In Faith’s “I Am Not” poem, Faith confronts the way she feel judged according to the visible markers of her social group. The group and the markers may be different – Angela’s blue hair and combat boots swap out for Faith’s Birkenstocks and Uggs – but both women feel judged as the “single story” associated with frequently misunderstood representations of their social

groups, and no more (Adichie, 2009):

I am not a basic white girl.
 I am not defined by what I drink,
 what I wear, and definitely not where I'm from.
 I'll do whatever makes me happy –
 and if that means drinking my “basic” chai tea latte,
 then that's what I'll do.
 Wearing cowboy boots to a concert doesn't make me basic, but happy...
 “Wow could you act more basic?”
 Why does this have to be a question I've been asked so many dang times before?
 Newsflash:
 My hunter boots are perfect for a rainy day,
 my Uggs keep me warm in the winter,
 and my Birkenstocks are comfy and convenient.
 I am not defined by what I wear. No one should be.
 But I am defined by what I love to do
 and the person deeper than my Patagonia and “white girl” high tops.
 (Faith, Writing Sample, April 15)

For Faith, the problem of the “single story” seems to stem from the way she intuitively understands that students in other social groups see her as a “carbon copy” of her peers; she knows she is not basic and demands that others understand her beyond the “white girl” markers obfuscating the particularities of her interests and passions. In their writing, Angela, Faith, and many other students evocatively challenged the way their identities are reduced by the social field of school each day, but their sharp refusal to share these works with anyone outside their like-minded peer groups limited the potential of this activity.

I fault my teaching for not adequately preparing the climate to make this dialogic sharing possible; however, the contentiously cloistered climate points to the degree of stratification and the difficulty of breaking through those barriers. Like the rancor-filled 2016 presidential election when voters and pundits surrounded themselves in ideological bubbles debating only with those who align with their beliefs and opinions, students want to share their more personal thoughts

only with those who already align with their thinking. The problem is that these one-sided conversations never allow for the dialogue through which students can embrace tensions and see another's perspective – see the differences and the connections across social groups. The social field of competitive schools seems to propagate this stand-off between social groups. The institutional structures of tracking separate and segregate our students into these divided social groups, each with marked perceptions of the other group that solidify through eleven years of ranking and sorting.

Especially in upper high school, those tracks become even more regimented with “accelerated” students taking multiple AP classes surrounded only by other AP students, and “regular” students taking mostly on-level classes with other “regular” students. And even at Pruitt, the school has introduced several academies (STEM and globalization) to avert students from leaving Pruitt to attend the International Baccalaureate and STEM magnet high schools elsewhere in the county. These students become ensconced cohorts seldom interacting with students outside their circles. However, my on-level American Literature class tends to be an exception to these polarizing tracks, with high-achieving students burdened by AP Physics, AP US History, and AP Calculus playing down a level to manage their schedules. A smart move, but these students can come into the class with a superiority complex that divides and alienates, and impedes a sense of community. Many times throughout the semester, these students whisper to me in passing that this class is the only on-level class they have taken, distancing themselves from any sort of association with the class and the students in the class. Likewise students relegated to the “lower” ranks as well bristle at this confluence of opposing ranks and groups.

Dialogue Divide -- How Stratifications Inhibit the Meaningful Exchange of Ideas

Even though students may deny that their perceptions of peers and social spaces are informed by preloaded assumptions based on rank and social position, their everyday interactions seem to reveal a different story. Throughout the unit, many of the activities that I devised in the attempt of breaking down these social stratifications only propagated them. The problem that I felt throughout the unit is that I could not quite devise a grouping strategy (besides students' self-selected social groups).

Resistance to exchanges across social groups. The most frustrating and disappointing example of a discussion grouping gone wrong transpired at the very beginning of the unit (Small and Whole Group Discussions, March 23-24): students had been working in self-selected small groups to analyze the connections between Janie's identity construction in Zora Neale Hurston's (1937) *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the granddaughter's in Mary Hood's (1984) "How Far She Went." On the second day, those initial small groups regrouped into two halves of the room for a preliminary discussion with seventeen students in each, rather than thirty-four, to give more students an opportunity to discuss. These two halves represented the two main social worlds operating in the class – on one side, the students who take on positions (mostly) based on their academic and athletic activities, and on the other side, the students who take on positions often in opposition to the school's dominant identities. Halfway through the discussion, I realized a problem that would occur throughout unit – students attempting to discuss the impact of social roles on identity construction were mostly listening to and agreeing with students speaking the same perspectives as themselves. At a discussion break, I asked students to mix up the groups – for half the students in each group to swap with the other group. The last thing I expected was the near-rebellion that followed: not one student moved, and long moments of

silence followed. Students in each group exchanged furtive glances with each other, a few subtle head nods and few not-so-subtle games of “nose goes” games played out. I waited a few more moments, not expecting this swap to be a big deal. But I quickly apprised myself of their staunch resistance. I asked again and their collective refusal solidified into protest from both sides of the room. Vociferous complaints erupted – they wanted to remain in their own circles, they did not see the point in swapping, they would get more out of the conversation where they were. I found myself in a literal standoff with the class’s two competing social worlds – their abject refusal to regroup and their stable [mis]perceptions of one another indicates the difficulty of introducing the type of dialogic activity through which peers admit to differences of opinion in order to negotiate new ways of thinking. Ironically, the two social worlds’ only point of unity is their disavowal of each other.

Deeper than a problem of social stratification, the resistance to acknowledge the experiences of divergent peers suggests the intractability of divisive social positioning. It impacts the way students see one another, the way they see themselves and the inability to reconsider new ideas and ways of thinking, at least socially. Again and again, I heard students widening the gap between their social plane and those of the opposing social groups, even as the activity attempted reconsideration.

Assumptions and stereotypes solidified in self-selected social groups. In a group activity to analyze stereotypes playing out in pop culture, students submitted and curated a collection of images, movie clips, song lyrics and newspaper articles that reproduce simplistic depictions of teenage life. I charged students with the tasks of anthropologists: to observe what the artifacts produced by a society reveal about their culture. In small groups, students analyzed the images and movie clips on iPads, and discussed the implication of the stereotypes depicted in

the images. As Jordan, Steven, and Allison, students who align with high-achieving academic and athletic social groups, flipped through the images (see Appendix F for activity and the student-submitted collection of images), they made some quick and glib comments about photos depicting “popular” kids –

Figure 4. Student-submitted artifacts showing teen stereotypes (slides 37, 41)



those with fancy clothes, cell phones, sunglasses. Steven notes, “In teen life, you have to dress really nice in order to be popular... everyone wants to look better than someone else. They just have this... what’s the word (*pause*)... they look better than everyone else” (in reference to the images shown in Figure 4). And they even refute a stereotypical representation of an athlete and a nerd (as shown in Figure 5).

Figure 5. Student-submitted artifacts showing teen stereotypes (slides 44)



Steven remarked,

A bunch of people just think that we’re just JOCKS (*emphasis*), and that we just bully smart, nerdy kids. That’s a really big depiction of high school life, with kids getting

shoved into lockers and stuff. And that's not true. It's not true (*more emphatic*). We don't bully people. (Stereotype Artifacts Discussion, April 1)

At this point in the discussion, they aligned with the depiction but refuted the dominant positioning and challenged the limiting portrayal. Even though the activity did not necessarily ask students to connect personally with any of the stereotypes depicted, Steven, a football player but also a creative writer, and Jordan, a runner but also a highly ambitious student, took offense with the reductive depiction. But in counterpoint to their first-person “we” alignment with the dominant positioning of the athlete, their discourse switches to third-person “they” distancing when they advanced to a picture of two teens wearing more edgy, dark clothing.

Figure 6. Student-submitted artifacts showing teen stereotypes (slide 47)



Rather than challenging stereotypes, they stabilize them, and also direct those stereotypes to perpetuating the stratifications in the class:

STEVEN – “It shows an image of goth kids, uhm...”
 JORDAN – (*quiet, under his breath*): “Goth kids, like this class”
 STEVEN – “Huh?”
 JORDAN – (*louder*) “Like this class”
Both laugh. (Stereotype Artifacts Discussion, April 1)

In the trajectory of their discourse, there suggests the pattern of identification and disidentification – the artifacts similar to their own social positioning they challenged as problems, as misinterpretations. The only image that went unchallenged was the one that

stabilized their interpretations of students across the room as different, as other. It also served to stabilize the social hierarchies at play in the “on-level” class where students in the top academic levels continue to distance themselves from the students they deem academically inferior, in this case the goth kids they assume to be academic burn-outs. When students consistently surround themselves with agreeable peers, they do not encounter ideas that help them break through the autopilot of their own assumptions.

For other collaborative discussion activities, I prearranged, along with my colleague and co-teacher Dr. Peart, the groups to bring into dialogue students from different academic levels, social groups and ideologies. In these groupings, I hoped that students would challenge one another to go beyond simplistic assumptions and to consider other ways of thinking, to find new understandings of the issues impacting their lives. But where the self-selected groups mostly skipped superficially along the issues, with students agreeably validating one another’s opinions, the pre-arranged groups tended to bring one of two results – on one hand, a tense, perfunctory reticence in which students got through the discussion activity as quickly as possible or on the other hand, an unreasonable and unproductive conflict in which students entered discussions primed to disagree with their fellow discussants. The problem in both these cases is the lack of listening – the collaborative discourse that shapes learning and growth. For teachers attempting to implement dialogic pedagogies, establishing the classroom climate that sanctions and supports the willing exchange of perspectives may prove the most difficult impediment, and the reason that many teachers withdraw to the comfort of more traditional forms of teacher-moderated discussion.

Three Socratic seminars, three grouping problems, three challenges to real dialogue.

For the final assignment in the unit, students engaged in a Socratic seminar to synthesize the

ideas gained from the works read and to raise questions about how to navigate the difficult terrain of being a teen in America today. Students selected one of three dates to conduct their seminars, so the groups strangely took on three distinct grouping problems, hinting at the obstacles teachers face in setting up these instructional strategies.

Group one: Like-minded high achievers: The first group comprised the class's most high-achieving students (probably because students were assigned a prep assignment to complete prior to their discussion, and they completed theirs expediently, always striving to finish each task quickly in order to move on to the next). Mostly homogenous, this group navigated the school's top-status social circles, both in terms of athletics and academics. Their discussion proved lively and far-ranging, but mostly agreeable. But their perspectives aligned too closely to yield much in the way of new understandings. They discussed the pressures of high-stress academics and college admissions. But their shared experiences did not allow them to see the experiences of other teens and students; they saw only the burdens of their high social status but not the advantages and privileges. In the following interchange, the participants in the discussion speak of their stresses and concerns but without diverse opinions in the discussion, their perspectives remain fixed on their own experiences and their way of navigating the education system of Pruitt:

- | | | |
|----------|---|-----|
| FAITH – | Well, I think there are so many more expectations for our generation; we are expected to go to college; we are expected to get a great job right after college. Some people are expected to go even farther with their education. So there is just so much that people are wanting you to do, and it is not really what you want to do... | (1) |
| JORDAN – | Yeah today with like the AP classes, that everyone is going so fast that we are not really truly learning. We are skimming over and memorizing information; we are not really learning and building | (2) |

- off of that year by year. We are just skimming over it and moving on
- ABIGAIL – It is like you got an A on the test, so you are smart, but then you forget it because you don't need to know it anymore... (3)
- ANNA – But I feel like there is more stress with the letter grade that you get. It is not just about learning the information. But everyone is so stressed about what grade you are going to get and how that is going to relate to your GPA, and what it is going to do for your future basically. And I don't feel like that problem was as big when our parents were in high school because they were just trying to get good grades, and they were going to go to college... (4)
- ABIGAIL – I feel like if you have those drawbacks and those setbacks, you don't succeed, because of that one thing. If you are succeeding all the time, everyone is like, oh you're so smart, you're going to be really successful. But if you do bad, then everyone is like, well, why did you do that? (5)
- BRYAN – It can change in an instant. Taking a sick day is scary because like you feel like crap when you go to school when you're sick, but it is going to feel so much worse when you get better, and you have all that work to make up. It feels so much worse than actually being sick. (6)
- ABIGAIL – It's just so much more stressful.... It is just about labels. You're an A student, you're a B student. You're going to an Ivy League, you're going to an in-state college. It's just like... everything is about labels.... (7)
- MS. BOWEN – OK so there is this term meritocracy. Are you guys familiar with this term? We like to believe that America is a meritocracy and we like to believe that our schools are a meritocracy, which means that the strong will rise, that if you work hard, and it is based on ability, it is not privilege. But do you feel like that is really true? Do you feel like it is the smartest rise up? And I think implicit in the term meritocracy is that it is a level playing field. So do you guys feel that schools level the playing field and that the strongest, the smartest rise up? (8)
- JORDAN – I feel like for the most part, the smartest rise up. There might be a few that get lucky or don't really apply themselves. It's not really that success is about how powerful you are or how much money (9)

you have but it's really how happy you are. It's also like, if you don't want to do something, you can do something different

BRYAN – And also I feel like a meritocracy is an out-of-date term because it's what everything used to be where the strong if you did work hard would rise. But I talked to my friend who is going to Harvard and he said that he and like 100 kids had the same exact GPA, the same exact clubs, they did the same things, they were like clones of each other, and he actually got his name picked out of a hat to go. They told him that he got his name picked out of a hat. So like a meritocracy, I think it is outdated because there are so many people now that are strong students that can do all these things that we have run out of levels... (10)

DYLAN – It is equal opportunity but not equal outcome. Everyone here is given equal opportunity to succeed, but not everyone is going to have the same outcome. It takes determination and hard work to get to the Harvard school or get to... (11)

BRYAN – Because there are so many compensating programs and even like higher rankings that, it is a good system for like a small amount of people whenever, when there are so many people reaching these high ranks that there is nothing you can do to differentiate them anymore. There are just so many people that are the same. You know, it is a good system but it has just been ruined by like how many people are in it now... (12)

(Small Group Discussion, May 17)

Their discussion allows for the sharing of the stresses and pressures that they feel; in one sense, this allows students to gain strength and solace from sharing the very anxieties and pressures of high-rigor coursework. However, the homogeneity of their discussion group perpetuates the idea that only the high-achievers face the stress and rigors of high school and the worries of college acceptance. Their incapacity to consider the bigger picture of competitive schooling – the pressures but privileges of high-track classes as well as the second-class status of those in regular or lower classes. Their inability to take on and reconsider the so-called meritocracy from another perspective almost acts as the way our society operates in microcosm. Bryan challenges the meritocracy only so far as it fails to perpetuate historical advantages for the top-status members.

Bryan notes, “You know, it is a good system but it has just been ruined by like how many people are in it now.” It is easy to understand how highly-ranked students like Bryan and his peers support a system for which they have learned to play by the rules of competition over three years of high school and even longer. That Bryan thinks that what ruins the system is the too-many competitors at the top only reveals the way the institution of school with its sequestered tracks does not allow students to understand how the rank and file impacts students at all levels, notably for students outside a students’ own level.

Group two: Contentious, mixed-perspectives group: Where the first group self-selected peers as the first group, the second group ended up as a an almost half-and-half mix of several different friends groups –

- Stephen, Allison and Caroline mostly affiliate with fellow athletes. Though diverse in terms of personality and attitudes toward school, what unites this group is their participation in the Pruitt’s ethos of school spirit and athleticism. These three students work hard and do well in school, but they tend not to obsess over grades to the same degree as the other athletes in the first group whose academic ambition propels them into an AP-centric friend group. But it would be an oversimplification to see the athlete friend group as monolithic, without recognizing each person as an individual. Stephen, a big guy who plays offensive line on the school’s football team, writes creatively and reads intuitively. He frequently pushes back on the perception of him as a stereotypical jock. Likewise, Allison is a soccer player but also participates in Relay for Life’s Miss Panache pageant and homecoming court. But she is a quiet student, always working hard but rarely speaking a word. In small groups comprised of her friends, she opens up a bit more. Funny and friendly, Caroline expresses a far more outgoing personality; she frequently discusses ideas important to her in class discussion and she serves as a good leader in small-group discussion, drawing quieter students into the conversation.
- Sierra and Angela mostly affiliate with those who express their identity in opposition to the dominant social group of highly-ambitious academics and athletes. Their outward appearance of rainbow-hued hair, expressive clothing and make-up puts them into an oppositional stance with the school’s dominant social group. But in the same way that students in the school’s main social group vary widely, it would be simplistic to reduce all students with blue hair into one stereotype. For instance, Sierra deals with Autism but it has made her more interested than ever in

neurochemistry and she spends her extracurricular classes taking extra science classes to prepare for her double major of chemistry and psychology. Angela expresses herself more creatively, through art, drawing and fashion. She is on the school's newspaper staff and writes about social issues and current events.

- Zachary and Hannah move more fluidly between social groups, but they mostly affiliate with a group of wise-cracking students that float between all the social groups comprising musicians, skaters, and other activities. Both Zachary and Hannah, as well as other peers in their social group, work diligently in school but lack the outward persona of the AP-driven student. Both participate frequently in whole-class discussion. Interestingly, both Zachary and Hannah are biracial, and discuss the idea of being multiple races in their "I Am Not" poems. Perhaps their more fluid movement between social groups has something to do with their multisided racial identities. Hannah played highly-competitive soccer through middle school; she became tired of the relentless practices and games, feeling that she did not have the drive or natural talent to go farther with the sport. Zachary is one of the funniest students I have ever met; his everyday trade is in irony and sarcasm, mocking almost everything that happens around him. His peer group spends more time riffing jokes than doing work; however, he still manages to turn in thought-provoking work, belying a more serious student than the jokester he projects.

As this diverse group of students headed outside to the picnic tables for their Socratic seminar, I had little idea that I would be moderating a near-shouting match only minutes later. Their diverse personalities and affiliations I had hoped would yield more nuance than the previous day's discussion, when members of the like-minded group mostly agreed with one another without digging deeper. However, I think the preloaded assumptions about one another coursing through these social groups set up a climate of discordance without negotiation. The open-ended conversation moved quickly to the topic of peer pressure, and the discussion broke down along an "us-versus-them" debate of whether peer pressure actually exists. Dialogically, this topic provided a rich opportunity to consider why each side of the debate held their opinions but each side barely listened to one another and focused more on the goal of winning the point for their side of the table:

- STEPHEN – Well uh, ok, I don't know, our next one is peer pressure. In society now, there is a lot of peer influence on what to do, mostly on what to do and what not to do, but mostly what to do. Like people try to fit in and do the wrong things, and you see a lot of kids, like my friends, do things they shouldn't be doing. But they do it just to fit into a group and to try to be accepted. It's like stupid. Well, yeah, it's bad (*trails off*) (1)
- (*pause, several start to talk*)
- ANGELA – I don't believe in peer pressure. (*quiet*) (2)
- STEPHEN – You don't believe in peer pressure? (*astonished*) (3)
- ZACHARY – I feel like peer pressure used to be a thing, but now people are not like "hey smoke this drug." Like if you hang around people who do drugs, you feel like, you are pressuring yourself because you want to fit in (4)
- STEPHEN – That is peer pressure. (5)
- ZACHARY – No but, people are not telling you to smoke it. You're just... (6)
- CAROLINE (?) – Well you can feel pressure to smoke it (7)
- (*overlapping talk, hard to decipher between Stephen, Caroline, and Zachary – 4:49*)
- ZACHARY – But they are not telling you to smoke it (8)
- CAROLINE – I am not saying that they are telling you to do it, but you see your friends doing it, and you might feel pressured to do it. (9)
- STEPHEN – And that is peer pressure. (10)
- CAROLINE – Here. BOOM (4:56) (11)
- OC: *Caroline's gleeful tone here suggests that the point of the conversation is not understanding to be shared and gained but rather a side to be won.*
- ZACHARY – But you are just making that pressure up (*pause, overlapping with Hannah*). Say you? (12)
- HANNAH – The whole idea of peer pressure is being around people who are trying to influence you. (13)

- ZACHARY – *(to Hannah)* You are on my team, like who’s side are you on? (14)
- HANNAH – I have my own opinions; I am an individual. (15)
- (lots of overlapping voices)*
- SIERRA – *(shouting)* All right kids, let’s chill for a second, one person at a time. (16)
- HANNAH – I am not a child. (17)
- (laughter)*
- SIERRA – *(directing conversation)* You first. (18)
- UNKNOWN – Wow. (19)
- UNKNOWN – That was intense. (20)
- HANNAH – There is about to be a fight out here, and I don’t think I am prepared for it. (21)
- ANGELA – Because you are stupid if you fall to peer pressure. (22)
- (lots of overlapping voices)*
- STEPHEN – I have seen peer pressure; I have seen kids being pressured... (23)
- ZACHARY – You are putting that pressure on yourself. (24)
- (lots of overlapping voices)*
- HANNAH – An example is that when Ms. Bowen asked if anyone wanted to give an opinion, and no one wanted to, but once [Zachary] started then everyone started going in, ‘cause now they all felt like they could. (25)
- CAROLINE – Or if there is a right answer, and you don’t know the answer but since everyone else said the answer, you start to feel dumb (26)
- (overlapping voices)...*
- SIERRA – I was going to add on to what Zachary said about the fact that you think they care what you do, but they really don’t. (27)
- ANGELA – They really don’t. *(almost in unison with Sierra)* (28)

- SIERRA – If you wanna do, do whatever, your friends will probably think, “that’s cool, do whatever,” so I don’t really think it is a huge deal . (29)
- ANGELA – Well it also helps you choose your friends. (30)
- CAROLINE – Well if they think it is, then it is peer pressure. (31)
- MS. BOWEN – Hang on Caroline (inaudible) Ok, Caroline, go (32)
- CAROLINE – If you think that they think, if you think you need to do it to be cool, then it is peer pressure. They may not think you need to do it but it is not the same thing... (33)
- SIERRA – If they are thinking badly, they are not your friends, like Angela said. (34)
- ANGELA – Isn’t that conformity though? You are not feeling peer pressure, you are just wanting to conform. (35)
(Small Group Discussion, May 18)

At Stephen’s introduction of the topic, his tone and wording suggests a perfunctory connection to it. He remarks, “Well uh, ok, I don’t know, our next one is peer pressure... they do it just to fit into a group and to try to be accepted. It’s like stupid. Well, yeah, it’s bad.” His tone at the end of this remark seems to hint at artifice or facsimile – a rehashed argument mockingly adapted from afterschool specials. His distancing tone from the topic perhaps meant that there would be little take-up from other discussants. The long pause hinting at their reluctance to take a up a topic hashed and rehashed in pop culture depictions of “serious teen issues.” However, the discussion takes a turn when Angela challenges his perspective, quietly at first but more resolutely as Zachary bolsters her perspective. In a matter of moments, the discussion energizes as the issue transcends the prescribed notion of what peer pressure is. And it would also seem that the battle lines are drawn, each side seeking allies to support their position. Zachary even challenges Hannah, asking “who’s side are you on?”

The source of the disagreement hinges on whether the discussants see pressure as internal or external, the influence of peers or the weakness of will. That Stephen, Allison and Caroline strongly support the idea of external influence perhaps parallels the positions they take on the social plane, with the jockeying for status rivaling competition on the playing field. And alternately, that Sierra, Angela, and Zachary strongly deny peer pressure and call it instead “pressuring yourself” parallels the positions they take in the school, already choosing to create and perform selves outside the predominating social ladder at Pruitt – in some ways, they have chosen nonconformity and have already defied the idea of peer pressure, in playing outside the rules of what the norms of Pruitt deem a socially-acceptable student. But more revealing than the content of their discussion is the discourse pattern itself. On three different moments in the discussion, the discourse devolves into alliances and disavowals. At lines ten and eleven, Stephen definitively and conclusively attempts to close the book, and Caroline explosively validates his point with a “Here. BOOM,” showing that the point of discussion is not to understand divergent opinions but to shut them down and win the point. Likewise, at line twenty-two, Angela attempts to put aside all other perspectives when she proclaims, “you are stupid if you fall to peer pressure.” Both groups admit that teen life centers on mammoth pressures to act in certain ways, to conform to friend groups and expectations, but they seem unable to see how other social groups feel those pressures and deal with them. The potential of dialogic activity is to help participants see beyond their own experiences and understand those of other people. However, the students in this group, and often throughout the course of the study, failed to see any more than the predetermined boundaries of their social circles.

Group three: Flippant and lively, the last “lowest” group: The last Socratic seminar fell on the last day of regular classes, when the chaotic feeling that comes on the brink of both final

exams and summer vacation takes over the school. With two groups finished, the last day of class meant that the students attempting to avoid the seminar could postpone it no longer. This group included a wider range of personalities, interests and levels – some were the quietest in the class, avoiding a mandatory discussion at all costs; some were the jokesters of the class, turning every topic into an opportunity for humor and iconoclasm; some were serious and anxiety-prone and artistic. This heterogeneous group also tended to be more *laissez faire* in their attitudes toward school – the discussion that resulted tended to be more humorous, lively, free-ranging in its very lack of pretense. Because many of the students in the group could care less about the social performance of being a top-rank student (perhaps because they had so often been reminded of their academic rank and positioning), their discussion did not include the jockeying for position that some of the others did; the downside is that the casualness of the group gave their discussion a good bit of superficiality and flippancy (this probably has much to do with it being seventh period on the last regular day of school). The beginning of the discussion started with the class's biggest jokesters, Xavier and Eric, posing the questions and awarding points for participation – their ironic rendering of a Socratic seminar had everyone laughing as Xavier raised such burning issues as the size of cell phones, the quality of airline food and the prevalence of mirrors. They did gradually settle down and get a bit more serious, and confronted some of the problems in the way school defines success in terms of the college admittance race:

REAGAN - They are trying to shove so much about college down our throats (1)
that it is actually hurting us. The guidance counselors tell us that
if you are going to go into a science major, you need these kind
of requirements; if you are going into an art major, you need
these kind of requirements.

XAVIER - They think that everybody already knows what they are going to (2)
do... People are going to college smarter and then all the colleges
want that smart kid and so they are trying to make it harder the

not-the-smart kid. So then only the smart kid can come in and the college finds their one aficionado

- MS. BOWEN – Do you think the competition for placement in college leads to antagonism or dislike in your classes? Do you feel like you are competing with other students? (3)
- ERIC – Yeah (4)
- XAVIER – Not really (5)
- DAVID – For the most part, no. Because I don't think, I mean I am not going to speak for everybody, but for me, I don't look at everybody here and think well these are my competitors or think I have to be better than them. I look at them and think these are people with feelings, emotions. (6)
- XAVIER - I could honestly care less about it. (7)
- REAGAN – I think there are probably students that have that feeling, but this group tends to be more laidback. It's not that we don't care about school, but we have a more laidback attitude about it. I mean, what our grade is going to be, our grade is going to be. (8)
- DAVID – Some kids don't want to go to college; some kids want to go to a tech school or some kids don't even want to get a high school diploma. I know some kids at one point that were just thinking about getting a GED. (9)
- REAGAN – I think at this point it is just so hard, you just think oh I am not smart enough as all the other kids. I can't do it. They are not even going to take the time to look at my stuff so why should I even bother to apply. (10)
- XAVIER – But they also make it sound like college admittance is really hard. It's not all hard... I think you guys need to quit telling us what the future is like, because half the time it is not true. (11)
- REAGAN – I don't think they are able to. Your future is not going to be our future, because you are grown up, and now it has changed (12)
- ELYSE – What they say is what they assume might happen in the future. And then we might overthink it, I guess. (Small Group Discussion, May 19) (13)

This group of students often discounted as underachievers, lazy, clownish or difficult managed to foster an environment for discussion where they could (after they passed through a spell of good-natured mockery) consider how high school and the transition to college sets up a system where teachers and counselors constantly remind students of the expectations and requirements, and how far they may be falling short of those requirements. Their frustration with school centers on the way it inhibits improvisatory and emergent identities; rather they are expected to have already figured out who they are and where they are headed. Especially for students who may lack the academic capital to compete in the college admissions race in the same way as highly ambitious students, school offers few other alternatives for academic participation.

Across each of the three Socratic seminars, students voiced their concerns and frustrations with the pressures teens face today. The alliances and divides that dictate so much of high school life carry over to discussions. As competition intensifies, social groups become further polarized. While these discussions did give students an opportunity to share their experiences, on the whole, the social context of the discussions stood as a powerful block to the dialogic exchange that reshapes perspectives and challenges tacit assumptions.

Social Silencing – How Competition and Stratification Limit What Students Share

Not only does school impact the topics covered in discussion, it often stops discussion before it even starts. For many students, school has become a place where they demonstrate their knowledge rather than develop it. The risk that comes from voicing an idea that they are not sure is the absolutely right answer often censors students to the point of silence. For Bryan, school has become an endless competition where students calculate a “mental scoreboard” by which they rank themselves against each and every student, particularly for students at the top of the “scoreboard.” This mental ranking impacts almost each and every interaction, those between

students and those between students and teachers. In a participant interview, Bryan likened these hierarchical interactions as a war to be won, and the constant battle of setting oneself apart informs every comment made, every question asked in the social sphere:

MS. BOWEN – Do you think, it seems to me from my observations, that a lot of times people want to talk or want to say something but they hesitate, and I’m wondering if you’ve ever felt that or if you think that is true? (1)

BRYAN – All the time, I feel that, all the time... [students] want to participate, and it’s not really like bullying so much as like it’s just, there’s kind of, sort of like there’s this underlying [feeling] that [teachers] are like the enemy and you don’t want to like befriend the enemy or become a teacher’s pet or anything like that. (2)

So, it’s really what’s going through my mind when I want to share is, normally when I want to share, I do, but there are, also, with school being so competitive... it’s not really like sharing, but when you need to ask a question or get help from a teacher, that’s the hardest thing to do because school is so competitive. If you ask a question, it really *is* nerve-racking because if you’re asking and other people get it, you feel already left behind because it’s so fast-paced and you have to keep up. It’s so hard, and if you fall behind it’s like off. If you don’t get something, I really usually just go home, and I’ll try and figure it out on my own versus going to the teacher because *it’s like out loud and they are helping you, and then everybody will look at you, [thinking] why don’t you get this*. Everybody else has to get it in like a day, so that you can do the homework and study for the test. [Emphasis mine]

If you so much as even really participate or answer a teacher’s question, people are [thinking], “why are you answering all the questions, it doesn’t matter, why are you helping? Why are you moving along?”

MS. BOWEN – What are [students] thinking when they think that? What is the reason? Is it the competition or is it something else when people are silently judging other people for participating? (3)

BRYAN – It's both. It's like a combination of competition where students kind of feel better than one another when you don't know something, and especially with the grades. And there are competitions about who has the better grades and stuff like that... Some people don't want to share, which is why they don't ask for help or anything like that. But also silently judging is the same people who scrutinize you for asking question. There's a lot of people, even me sometimes, it's like, on a bad day I'll just look at someone who's answering all the questions, I will be, "why are you answering all the questions? Why are you helping out the teachers?" With, because our relationship with teachers versus the students is so strained nowadays, it's like, you really don't know them. (4)

Then when, these other students, they are helping [teachers] out or participating in the lesson, all for a grade, you just sort of don't like them, you just [think] why are you helping them? They are the enemy.

At the end of the interview with Bryan, I felt almost literally bruised by what he made clear to me; I thought I understood what underlay the immediate problem of inert discussions in my classroom and the more extended problem of perfunctory schooling. But it was almost like Bryan turned on a light, and I saw clearly for the first time the way school turned learning into a minefield, where any misstep would lead to peers judging peers, where a person could lose points in the way they calculate their social standing and academic positioning. The social sphere informed by institutional "rules" enacts a constant mental calculation of what it will cost to speak out, to stand out. To be judged as either ostentatious in knowledge, complicit with the teacher-enemy, or remedial in ability seems an almost unwinnable war, and thus the only choice is silence: keep your head down, do your work, earn your points, play the game. The pressure that comes from attempting to excel in school does not stop when students check their grades (endlessly), but it plays out socially as students feel they must outperform and outrank one another. As performance becomes more visible in our schools with students comparing the

number AP classes taken, the score on seemingly endless assessments and tests, the colleges applied for, the scoreboard becomes more and more omnipresent and unavoidable. As Bryan said, no matter how large or small, every point gained on an assignment becomes an advantage or a liability in the competition.

Theme 2 -- Resistance to flattening hierarchies – the difficulty of “(re)doing school” outside the competition of performance measures (the chain of assignments, grades, GPAs)

As the study progressed and I observed students bristling against the labels to which they have been acculturated for ten or more years of competitive schooling, one of the most surprising tensions were their vacillating attitudes toward educational hierarchies. At times students would deride the practices that segregate students as early as second and third grade, and at times students would argue for the necessity of tracks in allowing each student to reach his or her potential. So deeply written are the rules of schooling where students compete to set themselves apart that they can almost imagine no other way of “doing school.”

Playing the Game by the Rules – Questioning but Affirming Hierarchical Structures

“Doing school” in a highly regimented and competitive system seems to have resulted in students clinging to the system they know, even as the hierarchical system may disadvantage them. Students may recognize the problems of this system in the ways that it transmutes learning to performing and competing, escalates worthwhile rigor to incessant assignments, and enacts ranks as social divides. But they also align with the underlying values of this system in ways that prevent them from challenging the inequities of this system or of conceptualizing the purpose of school in any other way. So inscribed into the practices of schooling is the *telos* of ranking and sorting that students (and even teachers) have come to see rank as the goal of school rather than

the result; more important than learning or discovery is maintaining one's place on that "mental scoreboard."

Taking another look at the first Socratic seminar between students in the top strata (academically and socially), the discussants dwell on the problems of incessant competition and pressure, they tend to stabilize the underlying structures of tracking as necessary ones through which students attempt to set themselves apart from their peers in the college admissions race. Bryan noted that the problem originates not with meritocratic structures but with the growing numbers of students vying for slots in AP courses and by extension competing for college acceptance. The idea of the "strong rising to the top" breaks down when

there are so many people who have reached the highest rank that we don't have any more ranks to give them... When there are so many people reaching these high ranks, there is nothing you can do to differentiate them anymore. There are just so many people that are the same. You know, it is a good system, but it has just been ruined by like how many people are in it now... AP classes are not for just smart people anymore. (Small Group Discussion, May 17)

The rules that Bryan and his high-level peers have been given to play are the ones of privileged pressure – they must work tirelessly to perform this role of the hard-working, highly-success AP student, and the reward is winning the game by garnering enough AP credits to earn acceptance at the college of their choice. It would then be almost impossible to admit that the game they are putting all their energy into winning is by its very essence an unfair one. They can only realize that the shifting rules are unfair – their privileged place in the institution is losing its status as more and more students want to play that game, to be accepted into their ranks. The difficulty of seeing the way the system is advantaging high-level students seems to parallel the perception of "reverse racism" in white middle class populations, Ben notes the "disadvantaging" of advantaged groups in the educational system through the diminished privileges (through more competition).

Difficult for students to acknowledge are the institutional and societal forces that inform their experiences, and especially the experiences of peers across different academic levels; they may not be able to see the *telos* that channels students toward particular social futures, and excludes other students from those futures. The discourse of individualism underlying a meritocratic view of education leaves students thinking that their accomplishments are solely their own, and by extension that others' failings are an innate failing. According to Clycq, Nouwen and Vandenbroucke (2014), "Educational success and failure is therefore perceived to be determined by individual talent and effort on the one hand and shortcomings of certain groups of pupils and parents with a working class and/or an ethnic minority background on the other" (p. 798). In a system that values success and recognizes excellence through much public recognition, the prevalent way of thinking is through individual ability and merit; it proves harder to see the impact of societal norms.

Students' argument on the debate over ability-grouping. As the unit led up to the state-mandated end-of-course tests which requires a document-based argumentative essay, I wanted to continue our dialogue about the tensions between identity construction and society positioning, but I also recognized the imperative of helping my students feel prepared for high-stakes testing. In keeping with Dsythe's (2011) "opportunity spaces" that bridge open-inquiry with more instructive teaching, I adapted the *New York Times*' Room for Debate feature (2014) "Are New York City's Gifted Classrooms Useful or Harmful?" as a practice-essay prompt (I also offered students two other prompts from which to choose). Of the students that chose to write on gifted education, all but one student supported the need for separate spaces for students of different ability levels, most making the argument that students needed challenge and rigor to develop to the best of their abilities. More interesting than the side of the debate that students

took up was the way students framed their argument – many students took up an ethos argument, paradoxically justifying gifted education as a matter of fairness and equality:

The establishment of mixed-ability classrooms and lower funding for advanced educational programs goes against American morals and wastes our goals of progress and perfection in the United States. The limitation of gifted classrooms around the United States' public schools opposes our country's ancient beliefs and goes against America's democratic ways...The smart kids who were very successful are forced to clash with those who don't try or care. The smart kids have no way of showing off their academic merit; whereas the lesser intelligent kids find no benefit of working hard because they are already on the same academic level as the smart kids. This system, like communism, will eventually eliminate all success and progress in our country. (Jordan, Writing Sample, April 27)

Over the past few years, schools have debated whether or not to continue different level classes. Some argue it can be considered racist and segregated, whereas others argue it gives students a chance to really succeed in a class that really suits them... Public schools in New York have programs such as Gifted and Talented, which give students an extra opportunity to grow. It just so happens that data shows the majority of the students happen to be white or Asian (Tipson and Potter)...The students who are in these gifted programs have earned their place there. They work hard and are given a wonderful opportunity to challenge themselves in their academics. It is important these students are given those opportunities so they really have a way to grow, which might not be given to them in a typical classroom. (Faith, Writing Sample, April 27)

On the opposing viewpoint, having these gifted classes could make those who aren't in the classes feel like they aren't good enough; it could make them feel dumb. The gifted classes could also put way too much stress on the students to try to be in one of the gifted classes. Having these classes could make students feel unequal. What this position fails to consider is that each student is treated equally; they all get a chance to work hard to get into honors classes. It would not be fair to students to not be able to pick the class that best suits them. (Caroline, Writing Sample, April 27)

In their defense of gifted education are some signs of how students navigate the institutional structure of schooling; their insistent validation of the meritocracy comes at the cost of recognizing that institutional and societal advantages may account for some of the reasons that students land in the upper track. Rather, students steadfastly believe that the sole criteria for academic placement is students' hard work and innate talent. To renounce the system would

perhaps force students to acknowledge the forms of academic privilege to which they have access, or hope to access. To acknowledge academic privilege (and perhaps by extension white privilege) is to admit the failings of the social structure that gives privileged placement to some and not to others. Rich and Cargile (2004) refer to the antagonistic climate that can result from dialogue about race in which white students grow angry and frustrated at feeling forced to take personal responsibility for societal oppression. The real problem of this resistance is the gulf it opens between open inquiry and truculent silence, and the resulting silence that inhibits the very conversation that could widen perspectives and allow for understanding across different experiences.

For Jordan, the flattening of hierarchies and the reduction of gifted funding is analogous to communism, and the upper-class fear of the redistribution of wealth. But this comparison obscures a perspective of tracking's inequities, disallowing the questions of whether the system fairly allocates resources and privilege in the first place. Granted, Jordan and other students did not read a thorough-enough accounting of tracking's history to recognize how much the structure unlevels the playing field, but their reluctance to consider the inequities of the system speaks of the resistance to engage in critical inquiry of a system that students must navigate to win the rewards of college admittance.

In Faith's essay, she goes so far as to note and acknowledge the disproportional representation of white and Asian students in gifted and talented programs, but she immediately dismisses the significance of racial inequality in these advantaged programs. She refers to gifted students as having "earned their place there," unable to acknowledge that the wide disparity in representation between white and minority students might mean that other advantages might account for the reasons that students gain access to gifted programs. In Caroline's

counterargument and rebuttal, she refers to the stigma that results from a hierarchical structure that values “gifted” students and treats other students as inferior, weak, or lazy. But both writers almost immediately retreat to a discourse of individualism, suggesting that students reach the gifted program only through their own effort. Similarly, Augoustinos, Tuffin and Every (2005) examine the discourse that Australian students take up as a moral argument, disputing affirmative action as unfair and antithetical to democratic ideals; the students claim that “individual merit is represented as the only legitimate pathway to university education” and that any effort to rework the systems of status that have historically disadvantaged Aboriginal groups meant that those individual students were “unfairly relying on social status to benefit from such [affirmative action] programmes” (p. 330). The difficulty of seeing beyond the individual level to the institutional level means that any reconsiderations of those social structures as a threat to academic positioning, and a disruption of the game that students have learned to play.

As a parallel to the discourse of individualism that pervades many students thinking about institutional structures, Caroline’s journal on Janie’s experiences in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* posits Janie’s compliance with the town and with Joe Starks as a sign of weakness, a fault in her character rather than as a result of the systems of power in the town. She did not as easily connect the societal forces of race and gender inequality as the source of Janie’s inaction:

I believe that Janie needs to stick up for herself. By not fighting back, it allows her husband to keep on controlling her life. She should tell him how she feels so she can have the relationship she wants. By letting him hit her and staying married to him, she gives him all the power. Janie should have realized early on that their relationship isn’t healthy and should have tried sooner to sooner to fix it... (Caroline, Writing Sample, March 17)

In her view of Janie as a woman who fails to stand up for herself, Caroline cannot see the societal forces that subject women, particularly black women, to systems of power beyond their

control. Of course, women did (and students do) fight those forces and find power to confront inequality, just as Janie does later stand up to Joe Starks and the judgement of the town; however, the real problem of hegemonies are the way that those systems of power often remain invisible, remaining unacknowledged and unchallenged. Even as students consider the unwritten rules that impact Janie, they often held her responsible for not standing up to those limitations. They could not see how the rules played against her, leaving her mostly constrained and disempowered. By extension, students moving through the systematic privileges of playing the game of competitive schooling may not realize that the system plays by unfair and inequitable rules.

Students' response to the experience of ability-grouping. Even as students support tracking as an ideology, they tend to see its implementation in more nuanced ways on the personal level. They can more easily see the way the system introduces advantages and disadvantages as they think of their immediate social world. These experiences often seem to contradict their arguments about academic hierarchies. In a participant interview with Faith who argued that students had rightfully earned their place in gifted placement, she also recounted her experiences in elementary school when those students would be pulled out of class for enrichment opportunities leaving the “regular” kids behind:

When I was in elementary school, I had friends who went to Smith Elementary School and they had this program called Target, [the district's gifted program].... So it was like if you could get into Target, you were special, like you were considered gifted by the school. *That started when we were in elementary school, so everyone was trying to get into Target and if you weren't in Target, then you were just kind of you were just kind of not really anything major.*

And then here in high school you have those [labels of] on-level, or honors or AP and I feel just among the students, like I can, I mean not look at someone but I can usually tell, “That's an on-level student.” and like, “That's an AP student.” *So it's not like I try to do it, but it's just that you can tell... I don't want to, but I don't know. I find myself labeling [other students] by just by what the school says.* But I feel like out of school like you

never, like there are other labels of being successful or unsuccessful so you don't have those divides like we do in school, because of classes. (Faith, Participant Interview, April 13, emphasis mine)

Outside Faith's logical debate on the so-called meritocracy of gifted education, her experiences lead to a different impression. From her earliest memories of schooling, she saw that students already feel the pressure to compete, and they also feel the sting of being excluded. When students are deemed either gifted or "not really anything major," that polarized divide leads students to begin to see one another through the lens of how the school sees them. For Faith, she admits that she does not want to categorize her peers as on-level or honor or AP, but the social hierarchies start early and visibly, with gifted students literally taking different path – out of the "regular" classroom and into pull-out programs.

Allison, like Faith, experienced the same sense of stigma – she watched the gifted students leave the classroom from first through fourth grades, and then in fifth grade she tested into gifted services, becoming one of those special students. On both sides of the divide, she could make no sense of how gifted education met its goal of enriching the educational experiences of students at either level. Instead she only felt the gulf that widened between students – students pulled out of the classroom and students left in the classroom all seemed random and meaningless to her; the only significant impact she felt was the resulting social stigma:

I tested in 1st grade. I tested one part and then they wouldn't let me test another part. So I never got in to it in that grade, and then I took [the test] again in 5th grade and I was in it for a half the year in 5th grade, but it was only for like certain subjects, I guess. It was really weird, but in like elementary school, I didn't really like how they did Target.

Because the Target kids, if you are, okay, so Target kids go to these different classrooms for the day and *you kind of felt like you were, like, lesser than them, because you would be stuck in the class and you don't get to go with them and have all the privileges that they had...* Like we would be in class and then they say the target kids go to the class and like half the class would leave. And you just would be still like, well, all right...
(defeated tone)

We would just do our normal thing and then they would have to, like, they were excused from it. Because they did their special things. And when I was in that class, you didn't really do anything, like, educational, *we did brain teasers, and I don't know, I didn't really do anything. I don't feel it was that special that you needed to be excused from the rest of the class to go.* (Allison, Participant Interview, April 13, emphasis mine)

From her perspective as an elementary school student, the gifted educational model made no sense to her – the social divide enacted between gifted and regular students only made the regular students feel inferior. Then when she finally gained admittance to this “privileged” space, the work seemed less meaningful than what she had imagined it to be. All she could see is the work that gifted students were excused from completing. The different rules for each set of students just seemed arbitrary and unfair. However, those divisive rules do not stop with elementary school – the pattern set by privileged and regular spaces continue to divide students and impact their sense of academic worth far past elementary school.

In the following two prose pieces from McClure's (2017) “I Am Not” writing assignment, Caroline and Chris each wrote of their identities as students – the ways they are perceived and constrained by academic discourses (though from different perspectives). Caroline wrote of the ways that she feels positioned by academic comparisons to her twin brother, that attempt to stigmatize her with feelings of inferiority; Chris wrote of the ways he rejects assumptions about his academic positioning, that attempt to make him feel as if he is acting in arrogant ways:

I am not dumb just because my brother seems smarter than me. Grades don't define me. He may have a higher GPA, but there are things outside of school that I can do better. I am not dumb because my brother is in higher level classes than me. I work hard in all my classes and get better grades than him but his higher level classes count more. I am not dumb because my brother has a higher ACT score. My ACT scores will get me into the colleges I want. He might be a better test taker but I am capable of doing things he can't. I shouldn't be compared to my brother. I am my own person. Just because I scored a better grade on a test than him doesn't mean I cheated. I am not my brother. (Caroline, Writing Sample, 15 April)

I am not arrogant and it's completely true. I just have and carry a lot of belief in myself a lot of times. I feels as if you don't believe or have confidence, it will be harder for someone to achieve his or her goals. That's why I carry my confidence and beliefs everywhere I go. It's unfair to me when people perceive me as arrogant because of my confidence. Just because I believe I can do good something doesn't mean I'm being cocky or arrogant. I don't believe I'm more superior than anyone, I'm just trying to be myself... It's extremely inaccurate to describe me because I feel as everyone is equal in some way, shape, or form. No one should be considered superior to anyone. I am absolutely not cocky or arrogant. I just have a lot of faith and confidence. (Chris, Writing Sample, 15 April)

Caroline's writing speaks to the school's sanction of academic status based on AP credits and college entrance. Measures of academic success (bonus GPA points that "count more," ACT scores that rank students according to test-taking abilities) quite literally bring home to Caroline how the community sanctions academic privilege and hierarchy, as she feels constantly compared to her twin brother and diminished by the ways his academic identity is more venerated than hers. In challenging this hierarchical positioning, she repositions her worth as a student, drawing value from her accomplishments even as they may be doubted by those who find her success dubious (cheating, lesser ACT scores). She challenges this position and finds worth in what she is both in school and out; however, the challenge only seems to go so far. She asserts, "He might be a better test taker but I am capable of doing things he can't," but she still mostly discusses herself in deficit terms, what she is not in comparison to his status, mentioning but never really detailing her own strengths and abilities. Outgoing and ebullient, Caroline has many strengths from my perspective – a strong leader in group dynamics, a caring person who draws quiet students into small group discussions. But she may lack the vocabulary to describe these strengths because the school tends to privilege other qualities, mostly sanctioned by academic level and GPA. Vasudevan and Campano (2009) refer to a climate of alarmism promoted by the *Reading at Risk* (2004) report that locates deficiency in students and in

communities rather than in institutional and societal inequities. The damage of these “discourses of deficit” comes in the way that students take up these positions, seeing themselves as inferior to so-called successful students. The social production of risk results from teachers, institutions, and society holding students accountable for their inability to succeed in inequitable institutions. While the inequities at Pruitt clearly pale in comparison to the harsher problems in underserved and underfunded schools in communities plagued by systemic poverty, still the production plays out on a more minor scale. While Caroline sees the inequities of so-called meritocratic schooling and challenges it, her emphasis on comparing herself to her brother in rather deficit terms fall short of asserting her individual strengths in asset terms, hinting at the pervasive power of this production of risk.

In Chris’s “I Am Not” piece, he as well deals with and challenges academic positioning, but from a different perspective. He resists the notion that he must distance himself from his academic successes, to avoid being seen as “arrogant or cocky.” While he more easily fits the teleological definition of academic success, he does take issue with a meritocracy that positions him as “superior.” Despite the advantages Chris gains from academic hierarchies, he calls for the same form of educational equity as Caroline, one that would recognize multiple forms of success, arguing that “everyone is equal in some way, shape or form.” The problem is that structures of schooling often fail to recognize many strengths beside the traditional academic skills that give Chris an advantage over Caroline, whether he wants to claim these academic advantages or not.

The difference between Caroline’s and Chris’s view of the meritocracy comes from their perspectives of this positioning – Chris tends to defend and stabilize positioning by rank based on supposed abilities and competencies, even as he calls for a more inclusive definition of

competency; while Caroline challenges a system that positions her as less than the academic definition of a successful student. The problem of meritocratic positioning arises from students taking up positioning inferred from its problematic ranking that confers or denies status and belonging. Davies and Harré (1999) refer to positioning as “the development of a sense of oneself as belonging in the world in certain ways and thus seeing the world from the perspective of one so positioned” (p. 36). Categories and subcategories of social belonging lead not only to senses of self within those categories but views of practices and others from within those categories; these implicit assumptions informed by one’s position often go unnoticed and unchallenged.

Performing Engagement – Dialogic Activity Inhibited by Procedural and Performative Schooling

With a key goal of nurturing the dialogic activity that challenges these unacknowledged assumptions, the unit endeavored to create a space for introspection and the meaningful exchange of ideas; the goal of allowing students to engage in critical inquiry of the institutions and social worlds that impact teens’ lives. However, the pattern of “doing school” in the hierarchical world of competitive schooling runs deep (Dyson, 1988) – students have long learned the rules of engagement established by assignments, grades, and GPAs. Through the course of the unit, I struggled with the feeling that I had changed these rules midgame – the patterns that govern interactions between my students and me, and between my students and their peers. To build on Bryan’s metaphor of the war between teachers and students, I had changed the rules and roles of battle. Students anticipate the battle of punitive schooling in which teachers plant land mines, fire unexpectedly, create obstacles that result in hours of arduous labor. Each activity or assignment requires students to outflank and outmaneuver the attack. Because this is

the pattern by which they know how to do school, they perhaps have come to conflate education with a war to be won, with endless conquests, challenges and battles. For teachers trying to rewire this system and to create more open-ended forms of dialogue, writing and learning, the challenge becomes establishing new rules of engagement.

To survive the pressures of competitive schooling, students have adapted to rigorous workloads, to the high-stakes tests, to the endless pressure of grades and GPAs – and surviving means that they must get through each assignments as quickly (and often as superficially in thought) as possible. However, to better understand how students take up the patterns by which they “do school,” teachers must consider the origin of the pattern – the institutional telos that underlies the school’s pattern of activity. In the name of rigor and advanced development, schools have made significant investments in AP classes, gaining prestige from the number of courses offered, the number of students taking AP exams, and the number of students earning college credit (Tai, 2008). The education watchword of rigor comes well-intended in its efforts to prepare students for advanced opportunities but seems to have resulted in unintended consequences – many students saddled with more work than can be accomplished in a day start to look for the means to survive. Wagner (2006) questions the implementation of rigor through AP classes that center on immense content covered in accelerated timelines and mandate high levels of memorization. In an interview, Bryan discussed the pressure to perform on every assignment, and the resulting shortcuts and cheating. The workload puts students in an impossible situation and he feels conflicted – regretting that he had to cheat but also justifying the cheating because of the impossible demands:

A lot of people I feel like nowadays with cheating, they really just have kind of become numbed to the badness of it because there, there is bond between people competing, but also if someone really needs help and they are trying to cheat, I feel like nobody would really call them out for not studying or people let people copy each other’s homework

because I feel like in this day and age with every assignment being piled on, if there's that one person who did it, they will share it, no matter who they are because I feel like nowadays with how fast paced it's going you kind of stick together... *it's because kind of the teachers have become the enemy really. Then you just, you don't really feel bad about it anymore, it's just, it's kind of scary that you don't feel any consequence.* Even with me who doesn't do that. But I've also felt, I've kind of become numbed to the repercussions of cheating and that it's bad. I just, it doesn't feel bad anymore because it's so competitive nowadays. Some kids to keep up they kind of have to. (Bryan, Participant Interview, April 20, Emphasis mine)

In the name of rigor and prestige, schools ratchet the intensity of coursework, and offer ever more AP classes. Students in response extend themselves beyond reason to take more AP classes, keeping up with the competitive pack and packing their college résumés. For students like Bryan, they feel that the only way to survive their over-packed schedules is to cheat their way through the myriad assignments that rigor brings their way. Pressure begets desperation and changes Bryan's very sense of integrity. To survive and to keep perfect scores, students engage in a "survival at all costs" moral code – he knows that cheating goes against his integrity, but the collective student code sanctions cheating to keep up with relentless pressure to be perfect. Rigor and competition makes students feel that they can make no mistakes, that they must score an A on every assignment:

It's really about, like today, I feel like with how hard it is to get in a college, *any advantage that you have over other people and I've noticed this, like any advantage I have over someone else makes me feel good now.* Even like, even so much as the class work assignment that I do something better, it makes me feel good because it's like, it really doesn't do much, nothing really does much even like test grades or anything like that because there's so many. [Emphasis mine]

You kind of just take everything that you can get because don't know what you can get on the next one, and you kind of have the sense of you want to gloat because you don't really know what you are going to get on the next test, and *you don't know if you are going to do better than this person. And you don't know if you are going to do better than them and it's really, it's become really competitive more than a learning experience really.* (Bryan, Participant Interview, April 20, Emphasis mine)

It would seem that Bryan contradicts himself – at once saying that students support one another by sharing homework or covering for a cheating student, and then also saying that students seek any advantage over other students. But the key is the types of students with which one aligns – both in competition and in comradeship. He said, “There is bond between people competing.” With a telos of rigor and prestige, only students at the same academic level tend to affiliate – even as they compete, they align to circumvent the very instruments of competition, and the bond at its essence is governed by competition, only in service of the competition not the bond. In this highly competitive group, their anxious fastidiousness to score every point on every assignment may have as much to do with the ways that they compete with one another as the ways they work toward high GPAs.

Students who frequently monitor the online grade point for even the smallest fluctuations also constantly monitor one another, trying to find out who scored higher on tests and even minor assignments. In the day-to-day life of a classroom, this relentless focus on accumulating points shifts the purpose from learning to scoring. Highly competitive students obsess over what they might earn rather than what they could learn. This shift in focus proved most difficult for the most ambitious students in the class whose relentless focus on academic achievement left little patience for introspection and dialogue. So much has the purpose of school become the demonstration of knowledge gained that they could not see the purpose of activities such as the small group discussions, reflection journals, and in particular the “I Am Not” poems. On the day that students shared their “I Am Not” poems, an activity conceptualized for the value of sharing of perspectives, I noticed that Jordan and Dylan, highly ambitious AP students, had decided to pass the audio recorder (for the purpose of the study), and read quietly into the recorder instead of to each other. Rather than actually sharing their poems with one another, they technically

completed the assignment but not the intention of it. However, I think I understand their reason after talking to Bryan about the performance of excellence. Any hint of weakness among AP students might result in a point deducted in how they rank one another on their mental scoreboards.

The emphasis on scoring points among the high-achieving students also tends to alienate students at the other end of the spectrum. The school's emphasis on rigor and excellence makes students outside the AP bubble feel lesser than. Its recognition of AP and honors students through academic letter programs, boards recognizing high SAT/ACT scores, and Who's Who ceremonies all relates to the community's value for academic accomplishment, in pursuit of college admissions. For Angela, the messages of achievement present this unrealistic ideal of perfection – the perfect student in the perfect school in the perfect community:

I think school makes you be perfect because I think it's just a thing that they do for the fact that when new people come in, you want your school to be, like, you want their child to go to the school. So that means that everybody has to be perfect; you have to have all these AP students going, so they have to be perfect. So the school can get like a sought-after reputation, of "Here we are the leading school in [the district]."

Then I think also that you kind of under-acknowledge the kids that don't take all AP classes and who don't have honors classes. It is really talking from my personal experience, with my friends. Usually it seems like people who take the rigorous courses, and take all the AP classes, they are totally getting more recognition and they totally get more help and they totally get all this more stuff that is totally open to them.

Well, all other kinds are really struggling and they fail classes and stuff, they don't get as recognized when they pass the class and stuff. And like an AP student would, even though you are working your hardest, you still would not get the acknowledgement that you want. The AP students could be making like B's and then like the high school totally gives them so much recognition because they are taking all AP classes. (Angela, Participant Interview, April 12, Emphasis mine).

Academic excellence as a measure of the community's prestige underlies the recognition and reification of highly-successful students. Outside that spotlight are the students who do not fit

the school's definition of success, the students who do not get lauded for their progress.

In the classroom, this divide between students vying for every point and those marginalized from the school's reputation of excellence creates an antagonistic dynamic that inhibits real community. Without community, what remains is students perfunctorily completing assignments without a meaningful exchange of ideas or co-construction of knowledge. As much as the goal of the unit was to create a space for this critical inquiry, students' acculturations to a system of competition and achievement is difficult to disrupt. Shifting from a more conventional grades-centered approach with reading quizzes, discussion guides, and unit tests to a more open-ended approach with discussions, journals, and projects left many students wishing for the "devil they know" rather than the strange new world of open-ended discussion that I attempted to introduce over the course of the unit. In fact, students on several occasions asked if they could take a quiz or complete questions rather than engage in discussion. Particularly the high-achieving students in the classroom expressed great anxiety, not trusting the open-endedness of the unit's assessments – they expected the quizzes and tests that maintain the hierarchical scoreboard. They know what to expect with these assignments, so there poses little risk of losing points. With very limited time in their overextended schedules, they want predictability and some grade reward for the time they invest in out-of-class readings.

Not only do students tend to adhere to the fixed pattern of performative schooling, but teachers as well have grown accustomed to the agreed-upon rules of engagement. Creating assignments for measurement rather than for inquiry tends to close the pathways for participation, not allowing for improvisatory and collaborative thinking. In the course of the unit, I kept tracking my own inability to successfully create the space for inquiry. At the beginning of the unit (as students discussed the first grouping of texts – *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,

“How Far She Went,” and *Everyday* as well as the stereotype artifact discussion), I wanted discussion groups to choose their own paths, so I deliberately minimized the scaffolds and assignments. Students wrote their own discussion questions, found meaningful passages to discuss, and looked for ways that the literature connected to the challenges for teens in the real world. In some moments, I do think discussions reached some level of nuance and depth, as students brought their different perspectives into negotiation. But as a whole, I thought the discussions seemed a bit flat and hackneyed – students rehashed mostly tidy observations and canned responses without students truly testing their assumptions and thinking through the more complex and contradictory causes for the problems that teens face. They still had the mentality of getting through the assignment as quickly as possible, and the dialogic activities I introduced in varying discussion formats did little to change those patterns.

In the middle of the unit, the class began to feel unmoored from the conventional activities that measure learning. Feeling that the discussions were not challenging or motivating real thinking, I retreated to more fixed discussion activities, with more elaborated scaffolds and teacher-centered goals. Teachers too become acculturated to forms of “doing school.” For a group of texts centered on young soldiers (Hemingway’s (1925) “A Soldier’s Home,” Owen’s (1918) “The Parable of the Old Man and the Young,” and Jarrell’s (1945) “Death of the Ball Turret Gunner” as background texts for understanding J.D. Salinger’s (1951) WWII experiences as he wrote *The Catcher in the Rye*). As I prepared the discussion topics (see Appendix G) and arranged the discussion groups to bring different friend groups and perspectives into contact, I knew that I was taking charge of the discussion trajectory, and taking away their potential for students finding their own response. I rationalized this decision with the hopes that students would go beyond the scaffolded starting point. But in discussion after discussion, students

worked through the topics as if they were a checklist, never making the discussion their own. This activity was the lowest point of the instructional intervention: the pedagogical design revealed how teachers fear the openness and the supposed lack of rigor in student-centered learning, and the students' perfunctory responses revealed how students have become accustomed to teacher-centered discussion.

In a group that included students from particularly diverse (and sometimes oppositional) friend groups, I saw many of the problems that inhibit dialogic interaction. Along with the pedagogical failings of the activity, a palpable tension between Nathan, Elyse, Savannah and Jordan created an obstacle to participatory exchange. What resulted was the perfunctory types of discussion that dominate much of the life in English classrooms; students go through the motions, but without any real connection to what they discuss. Nathan takes the lead in the discussion, while the other members of the group take a backseat role; he does his best to bring his group into conversation, but almost nothing works. Wiser than his years, Nathan is a student who finds nonsensical some of what happens at school. He finds value in the relationships he has developed, as he talks and writes about supporting friends who have gone through depression. In terms of the way that school positions students, Nathan falls in the middle majority – neither remedial nor advanced, he goes through the school day mostly effortlessly, and creates his own sense of purpose outside the school's definition of success. When I interviewed Nathan about his experiences at school, he talked about his frustration that school tends to reduce people to one dimension, to the types of work they complete in the classroom:

I think we label students and label people sometimes, but I see myself as a person before seeing myself as a student. I see myself as a nice guy, understanding and [someone who] talks to people when they need something like that. As a student I see myself as, hardworking in subjects that I enjoy but sometimes I slack in other subjects that are harder for me to understand, or if I don't connect to the teacher very well... students who take AP classes are very smart, which they are. *But they have really good obedience to do*

that stuff. Like I can take an AP class, I can pass the test but I wouldn't do homework and it will kill my grade. That's my problem with it. If I take a class I'm not interested in, I'm not going to put the effort in it. That's my main problem as a student. (Nathan, Participant Interview, April 19, Emphasis Mine)

For Nathan, the hierarchical structures of the school do not impact his sense of self – he works hard on the work that matters to him, but he views the stereotype of the AP student frantically and obediently striving to excel on every assignment unnecessary. Coincidentally, Nathan found himself grouped on this day with one of the most ambitious students in the class, Jordan.

Frequently through the year, Jordan submitted far more work than necessary, and often sought validation that the work he submitted would earn an A. Smart and articulate but fairly reserved, Jordan does contribute to class discussion but almost with an air of being forced to speak. The other two members of the group – Elyse and Savanna – are both very quiet students. Elyse, a smart and hard-working student, seldom speaks to anyone outside of her friends, the group of alternative girls in the class (the ones coincidentally that Jordan laughed off as “goth”).

As I tried to discern what went wrong in the group, and in the activity as a whole, I considered the fixed patterns impacting so much of school life – the pedagogical decisions that inspire passivity year after year, the institutional norms that divides students into ranks, and the social reproduction of those divides. The dynamics of the group seemed to doom the discussion to malaise from the very beginning. I first listened to the group's discussion on audio and also watched their interactions on the video of the whole class. I noticed immediately that Jordan contributed nothing to the group discussion. At the beginning of the group's recording, Jordan asks Nathan about the discussion preparation assignment (to annotate the two war poems) – students worked on the poems the previous day, finished for homework and were to be submitted at the end of class. Jordan first, very quietly, asks Nathan to borrow his poems in order to copy the annotations. Without a pause, Nathan continues leading the discussion by reading and

discussing the discussion topics and questions; he attempts, despite the obstacles, to step up as a leader. The fits and starts in this discussion show the difficulty of cutting through social conflict, and to collaborate on critical inquiry.

NATHAN – Which one do you want to start with? Do you want to start with actual story or do you want to start with one of the poems? (1)

JORDAN – I guess we'll start with the poems. (2)

NATHAN – Ok, we'll start with the "Parable of the Old Man and the Young." (*reading the question provided on the discussion scaffold*) What does Owen want the reader to see about the powers/politicians/monarchs that send the young men to war? (3)

JORDAN – I thought we turned those poems in. (4)

NATHAN – No, we're turning them in at the end of class (5)

ELYSE – Uhm (*shuffling of papers*), so we're doing this [poem] first, the top one (6)

NATHAN – Yeah the top one (7)

JORDAN – (*quietly, to a student in another group*) Dylan... (8)

NATHAN – Ok, what is the question (repeats) What does Owen want the reader to see about the powers/politicians/monarchs that send the young men to war? (9)

Uhm, maybe that war is never good, that it has too much violence or something like that. The story talks about how the son or whatever is just offering something to make the angel happy or whatever and I think that that annotation says that we should stop killing each other instead of trying to work for the greater good. That's how I took it, I'm not sure if that's how you guys took it.

ELYSE – I can see that. (10)

NATHAN – They're just going back, they're not helping each other, you know, just backtracking (inaudible). Anything to say? (11)

JORDAN – (*inaudible*) I'm trying to find it. Sorry (12)

SAVANNAH – What was the question? (13)

JORDAN – (*again, quietly, to a student in another group*) Dylan (14)

NATHAN – *(repeats)* What does Owen want the reader to see about the powers/politicians/monarchs that send the young men to war? (15)

SAVANNAH – the what? (16)

NATHAN – *(repeats)* What does Owen want the reader to see about the powers/politicians/monarchs that send the young men to war? (17)

SAVANNAH – Oh *(pause)* (18)

NATHAN – Alright, Uh *(pause)* How does he present the role of religion/the voice of God in terms of men/powers starting wars? (19)

JORDAN – *(low)* Uhm, I think it should be fine (20)

Observer Comment: Jordan is, I believe, speaking to Dylan about the assignment due at the end of class. He has asked to borrow Dylan's annotations in order to copy them down.

In this first segment of their discussion, the participatory energy flounders right from the start.

As the group focuses on the questions as a task to be completed rather than a starting off point, it leaves little room for participants to incorporate their own thoughts. So much of a discussion is reactionary: how one participant feels that others listen and responds is a sign of trust. If teachers cannot develop spaces in which students feel trusted and trustworthy, the dialogic activity may never be able to cut through all the other obstacles inherent in classroom life – the chaos and noise, the competing purposes. As Nathan shares his thoughts with the group, Elyse shuffles through papers but at least validates Nathan's response; Jordan attempts to get a copy of the poems from his friend Dylan; Savannah asks him to repeat the question twice but makes no contribution. The problem of the faulty discussion stems from the students' lack of connection and sense of agency in the discussion. Rather than giving students ownership, my pedagogical design took it away, basically leaving them with the equivalent of a verbal worksheet to complete. Teachers who complain of lifeless discussions may have to account for the ways that English classes acculturate students to a history of "fill-in-the-blank" discussions in which students are expected to recite the correct answer without meaningful participation and inquiry.

At line 11, Nathan asks Jordan if he has “anything to say.” Paired with two reticent peers and Jordan, it would seem that Nathan’s question sought a lifeline, for someone to join an essentially monologic conversation. Nathan’s tense and sarcastic “Alright” is very telling to the frustration of attempting to build a discussion with peers who do not reciprocate his efforts. In the next segment, Nathan continues to ask and answer the questions, but Elyse and Savannah begin to join the conversation. Jordan continues to seek a peer from whom he can copy the assignment. It is worth noting that he does not ask any of the students in his group. Perhaps he does not want to put them in an uncomfortable position by asking to copy their work, or perhaps he only trusts students from his own academic level. Nathan, as the discussion moderator, takes the most vocal role, often asking and answering the questions without much participation from his peers:

NATHAN – I think both the governments send armies off to fight. I think it could be a dictatorship or it could be a single face, but I think he is comparing God or comparing the angel to a voice of reason who is saying don’t worry about it, it’s not worth it. You’re just going to backtrack even more, because you are seeing who is better. And uh, I guess the God aspect is like someone who, I don’t know, I guess you could see it as God starting the battles, because God sends the angel to stop the battle. (21)

SAVANNAH – It’s kinda like a test (22)

NATHAN – What? (23)

SAVANNAH – It’s kinda like a test (24)

ELYSE – to see what kind of choice you’ll make (25)

NATHAN – It’s not worth going through the test, to see what happens when you don’t do it, like I said, I think that’s the angel; it’s the voice of reason [saying] it’s not worth it; you’re going to kill more people than you are going to help... Is that (*inaudible – good, I think*)? (26)

ELYSE – Yeah (27)

NATHAN – What is the effect on young men and on society of the decisions that politicians make? (pause) (28)

Well, they send young men to war for barely any reason at all. In this one, they do not name any particular war, but it is probably not over something too huge

JORDAN – I think it was World War I. (29)

NATHAN – It was? Then it was huge? Was it actually over World War I? (30)
Yeah, you're right. Well then it is huge. I was wrong, there was nothing too small about that one.

I don't know, I think there is a lot more that goes into it. I think that uhm...It's kind of hard to explain. You know I don't think it is just young men. You know how it says how society affects young men. It affects the family, the people who know the young men, etc.

Even though the discussion falters from the very beginning, Elyse and even Savannah begin to collaborate with Nathan to consider the significance of what the war poems reveal. It is interesting that Jordan makes only one contribution to the discussion – to correct a factual error of historical context. What I find most heartening about this part of the discussion is that despite the faltering start and despite Jordan's nonparticipation, Elyse and Nathan attempt to build momentum. While Nathan carried most of the discussion in the previous segment, the dynamic begins to switch in the next segment. As Elyse takes the role of moderator, she begins to make more frequent comments and the collaborative nature of the discussion improves, slightly:

ELYSE – (*reading the discussion questions*) What does Jarrell want the reader to see about war, and the costs of war? (31)

NATHAN – I guess the costs is that you don't just take that young person's life, you affect the people around them. I guess how he compares it to the womb or whatever, I guess he forgets his mother and starts to believe that his mother, and they're expendable, they can be replaced, a life should be... (32)

Observer Comment: At 8:23 during Nathan's comment, Jordan gets up and walks to Bryan's group to ask Bryan to borrow his poems to copy.

ELYSE – Like not all of them are going to become war heroes, and they realize that... (33)

NATHAN – they just abuse them. A life should be able to be replaced, they should not be able to replace them. (34)

- ELYSE – Uhm, yeah, what responsibilities does a government have to its soldiers? (35)
- NATHAN – To protect them during the war, after the war, be responsible for their actions, (36)
- ELYSE – Be respectful (37)
- NATHAN – Actually find their body (38)
- ELYSE – Depending on how they die (39)
- NATHAN – They respect everything that's going on, even with their death, even if they survive the war, they respect them coming home (40)

The brevity of their responses is typical of the “asked and answered” ways that students have become accustomed to think of discussions in the IRE model, where the goal is to recite some predetermined answer. Nathan and Elyse do start to build on each other's responses, but only in the most cursory ways. The goal of dialogic education is to orient classrooms toward purposeful meaning-making, to open the types of discourse through which students can stretch the bounds of their thinking, and to practice literacies through meaningful reading, writing and discussion. But I struggled to give up the control, to truly give students the power to guide their own learning; the resistance in this case was mine. The omnipresent concern of rigor lead me to question the unit's direction: are the discussions challenging enough, are students learning enough, will students go beyond superficial thinking, do the expectations uphold the school's definition of success? At each turn, teachers fall back into the fixed patterns of performative schooling, choosing activities that offer the guise of student control and autonomy but not the reality of it. The more significant problem posed by these half-hearted attempts at discussion and dialogue is that students begin to see discussion as performance rather than creation. This form of perfunctory discussion they know how to do, similar to the ways that students have learned to do school. Thus each faulty discussion along students' history reduces the potential for the next one to go beyond canned responses. The durability of these perfunctory practices makes

it all the more difficult for teachers and students to imagine new possibilities for classroom life.

**Theme 3 - The value of challenging obstacles, of still attempting
to create spaces for self-authoring and self-expression**

Over the course of the unit, many of the designed activities fell flat and failed to open the dialogue I had hoped would destabilize the fixed patterns of competitive schooling. But some points hinted at the potential that might come from continuing to push wider the boundaries for more participatory schooling. Students wrote and spoke of the ways that school had reduced them to a number or a test score or a GPA, and in these moments, I still saw the urgent need for finding ways to make school more than the gauntlet of assignments, tests and grades, despite the difficulty. The potential of these activities comes from the way that students looked for and sometimes found ways to reposition their senses of self; they noted the ways that the immediate context of teachers, parents, peers and friends as well as the extended context of cultures, institutions and discourses failed to see them as they see themselves. But more importantly, this act of acknowledgement and reclamation could undo the impact of institutional positioning and labeling on the way a student may see him or herself (Beach, Johnston, & Thein, 2015). Bryan, the student who described the way students silence themselves out of fear that they will be judged by their fear, noted that he felt affirmed by dialogic exchanges in our class:

Sharing I normally do like to do, which is something I've learned in this class; [it] is good because I feel like everyone in this class has kind of gotten used to our discussions, which is a really good thing because this class has kind of help me feel more confident, feeling that my ideas are, anything that I say really won't be discriminated against or countered or anything like that. Versus in other class we are, if you, so much as, even really participate or answer a teacher's question, people are, "why are you answering all the questions, it doesn't matter, why are you helping? Why are you moving along?"

For Bryan, the discussions gave him a stronger voice to speak his mind, to take risks he may not take in other classrooms. Building an atmosphere where students can break through the patterns

that position students as competitors and teachers as enemies takes persistence to create a new dynamic where classmates begin to see one another as collaborators. Along the course of the unit, I witnessed a few moments of potential where students challenged the positioning that reduces their identities to one dimension.

To examine how students challenge limiting positions, I would like to return to that discussion on Levithan's *Everyday* when students began to critique the lack of development of some of the characters (especially as the novel begins to focus more on the developing romance between Rhiannon and A and concentrate less on the life of the teen A embodies in each chapter). Many students joined a quick and jumbled discussion, weighing in on characters who they found poorly represented by the author. Students quickly built on each other's examples, often not needing a moderator to manage turns but often interrupting and overlapping:

- XAVIER – I think Roger's [chapter] was like two and half pages long, I hate that (1)
- MS. BOWEN – You wanted that chapter to be longer? (2)
- XAVIER – I wanted all of them to be longer, or I wanted all of them to be shorter. I didn't like how it developed some characters and not others. Yeah, I'm Skyler, Bye (*referring to a character that only occupied two paragraphs in the book*) (3)
- SIERRA – (*quickly*) Yeah, I felt the same way (4)
- MS. BOWEN – Yeah, Skyler was pretty undeve--- (5)
- ZACHARY – (*overlapping*) Well, I feel like they put that chapter in to show— (6)
- XAVIER – (*overlapping*) Right (7)
- ZACHARY – (*overlapping, insistent*) Well it showed that -- (8)
- BRYAN – (*overlapping*) Well, like Leslie's chapter had nothing to do with the Rhiannon girl, and then Roger's chapter is so short but it had more to do with the girl. So why did he develop Leslie when she had nothing to do with... (9)

- DR. PEART – Which chapter did you say was short? (10)
- BRYAN – Roger’s chapter was short, he was more involved because that was when [A] was emailing the girl. And Leslie’s chapter was so long and developed but it had nothing to do with the rest of the book after that, it was just her and her problems for like a whole day... (11)
- REAGAN – The point of the short chapters, Xavier, was to show that some people have complex lives and some people have simple lives that are really easy to understand, and you don’t need to take a long time to look at them. So the chapter about one of the girls and her boyfriend, that one is just cut and dry, black and white, there is not that much to explain. That is just one life, I have seen that a couple of times and so it does not need to go very long to explain it... (12)
- SIERRA – Going back to Rhiannon, I think it would have been a much better novel if they had worked on A’s character, so even if over the course of the book even though he was living a different life, but they focused on Rhiannon, like if every chapter went as deeply into the character as the chapter with Justin and Rhiannon, if we got that involved in everyone’s life and tried to understand everything from different people’s point of view, he would be a few steps ahead of the rest of us who can only see with our own eyes. (13)

The participatory energy in this interchange seems to come from the group’s interest in ideas of representation and visibility. Their frustration that Levithan gives minor characters in the book short shrift speaks to their hopes to understand a wide array of teen lives in the novel and beyond, to be able to live through a range of experiences. It also speaks, perhaps, to their frustration that their own identities often remain “underdeveloped” – flattened and misunderstood within the institutions that see them only as students. Sierra eloquently argues,

if every chapter went as deeply into the character as the chapter with Justin and Rhiannon, if we got that involved in everyone’s life and tried to understand everything from different people’s point of view, [A] would be a few steps ahead of the rest of us who can only see with our own eyes.

Sierra notes the value of taking perspectives that enrich not only our understandings of other people, but our understandings of ourselves (Beach, Parks, & Thein, 2003).

As the discussion resumes, still focused on the frustrations with flattened minor characters, students also found fault with the dominance of the escalating relationship between A and Rhiannon, perhaps in the stereotypical necessity of young adult novels to center on a love story that overtakes other narrative possibilities. Tray, in a journal he wrote on *Everyday* the day after this discussion, also complained that the romance led A to break his own “code” because of a “standard” plot convention, perhaps reducing teenagers themselves to YA romance archetypes:

A is a consciousness that is forced to live other people’s lives. He lives by a code of invisibility, just to survive in their lives as invisibly as possible, to tread water until the next day and try not to change anything. This changes when he finds love, how standard. (Writing Sample, 13 April)

Tray’s journal shows the way that stereotypical representations of teenage life frustrate students’ need to be seen as more than a standard type, to move beyond the invisibility that comes with being seen as a typical teenager (Holland et. al, 2001). The way Tray thinks about invisibility is particularly revealing as he tends to go through his school days with his own code of invisibility – he does his work, but as quickly as possible; he almost never participates in whole-class discussion and seldom looks as if he listens to his peers, yet he frequently comes up to me the minute we stop class for the day with incredibly perceptive ideas that he never offers to the whole class. His demeanor could make it easy to dismiss him as another apathetic teenager, but Tray is one of the most motivated people I know, participating in the school’s NJROTC program, building computers in his spare time, working several part-time jobs to afford motherboards and circuits. His life outside the classroom defies easy categorization; he is far from a standard plot.

In defiance of the way that people may be seen as a standard plot, Tray also wrote of stereotypes that crumble once one more fully understands the lives of the people who may at first only be seen as type until understands more fully:

Stereotypes are created and formed because of some vague truths. The fact is that these truths don't cover an entire group and can easily result in the forming of stereotypes. In *Everyday*, A, the main character, sees many different groups of people. He has been in the "hood" and in diabetics, even in the lives of an emo. He has seen how the 3 brothers in the "lower side" aren't bad, just in a bad situation, how the diabetic doesn't eat just to eat, but has to watch what he eats and the struggles to control it, and how the emo was fighting depression, and desperately looking for an exit. These stereotypes that all hoodies are bad people and that diabetics eat too much, and how emos just want to cause harm are only vaguely true. These things cause harm to people in similar groups. The harm caused only leads to worsening of both the stereotypes and their confidence. (Tray, Writing Sample, 15 April)

In this journal, Tray hints at the ways stereotypes reproduce through application of these "vague truths," so each time a person is stereotyped, the vague stereotype may become more fixed and durable. He also points emotional impact of being viewed as nothing more than a stereotype, at the ways it restricts one's sense of confidence that one is more than the stereotype.

Teens reject the stereotypical ways that they are so frequently perceived by teachers, parents and a society at large; they demand to be seen as "complex characters" with varied identities and motivations. As the discussion on *Everyday* progressed, students continued to bemoan Levithan's choice to turn an inventive story into a standard romance plot:

- | | | |
|-------------|---|-----|
| XAVIER – | I think that is why I hate the short chapters and the fact that Rhiannon becomes this recurring character | (1) |
| DAVID – | I thought it was unnecessary | (2) |
| MS. BOWEN – | The relationship with Rhiannon was unnecessary? | (3) |
| | <i>Several students start to speak at once, Caroline raises her hand, straight up and urgently, wanting to be heard</i> | (4) |
| ZACHARY – | It should be about – | (5) |

- XAVIER – *(overlapping)* It should be about whoever the body is -- (6)
- BRYAN – *(overlapping)* We would learn things about A (7)
- Students on the left side of the room dominate discussion in overlapping speech and Caroline lowers her hand* (8)
- XAVIER – *(enthusiastically)* Yeah that would be way more interesting than -- (9)
- Lots of overlapping voices as students around the circle take on the point with their neighbors or perhaps talk about other things, Caroline raises her hand again* (10)
- MS. BOWEN – Caroline, I see you. *(pause)* Alright everyone, *(to calm the individual conversations)* Caroline and then Hannah (11)
- CAROLINE – I feel like throughout the book, we are just waiting for her to break up with Justin and then to somehow figure out how A could become a person and then I was just disappointed... (12)
- HANNAH – I was just going to say that Rhiannon's character goes to show that she was a constant for him and he had never had a constant like love or relationship, someone where she got to see them at their like highs and lows, he always just saw them for like that one day, so I guess Rhiannon was showing like that person development. So I think she was the focus of his development *Long pause.* (13)
- MS. BOWEN – I think that is a good point, if you take what Hannah says, that Rhiannon is a constant for him. What does that say about what people need, what teenagers need when you are changing so much? *(pause)* Does anyone want to build on what Brianna is saying about constants, and what people need? *(long pause, silence)* Oh, I killed it. *(referring to the silence in the room, much laughter)*... (14)
- (15)

The discursive turns in this part of the discussion suggest how fragile and fleeting real engagement can be: utterances that invite discussion and utterances that squelch discussion can be frustratingly hard to predict. Xavier's perceptive criticism about uneven character development brings students into the discussion with a lively interchange comparing well-developed characters who show varied teenage lives to poorly-developed ones. But Hannah's

equally or perhaps even more thoughtful point about constancy in relationships results in no students taking up her line of thought. Uptake from student to student is the mark of a strongly dialogic discussion, meaning that students listen to and build on each other's ideas in the co-construction of knowledge. But this discussion tends toward monologic engagement with only sporadic uptake, signaling that students may not really be listening to one another (Applebee et al., 2003; Caughlan & Kelly, 2004; Beach, Thein, & Parks, 2008).

With its mostly homogenous student population, Pruitt tends to be a place where many students resist multicultural themes and social justice issues, perhaps feeling that they may be blamed or judged for perpetuating inequity in our society or that their levels of status and privilege may not be fair or earned (Thein, Beach, & Parks, 2007). However, students tended to respond more openly to texts that transported them to a different time and place, to life experiences far different from their own. The beginning of the unit centered on examining cultural models that limit identity construction, thus these societal norms that inform society may feel more distant and more immediately observable and more noticeably restrictive (as in Krebs' identity in "A Soldier's Home" informed by discourses of masculinity and valor in post-WWI America and as in Janie's identity in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* informed by discourses of femininity and race in early 20th century America). In thinking about identity, students reflected on how characters continually undergo a reframing and repositioning of self in relation to the social world, using some basic terminology that theorizes identity as

- a construction from social, cultural, political means – in other words, what ideas and cultural norms influence a person's sense of being?
- a performance that may not necessarily be fixed in all circumstances – in other words, what self does a person portray as he or she enters various social circumstances?
- a rejection of social worlds that may not allow a person to develop into the type of person he or she wants or need to be

- a negotiation that allows a person to improvise new ways of being, partially complying and partially rebelling against the social worlds.
(Class Presentation, 17 March)

Looking at the following passage from the novel (set in the moments in the film just after Janie's husband, the mayor Joe Starks, slaps her in front of a crowd of townspeople for speaking back to him and speaking up for herself), students reflected on what it cost Janie to subvert her hidden identity and to perform her outward self:

Times and scenes like that put Janie to thinking about the inside state of her marriage. Time came when she fought back with her tongue as best she could, but it didn't do her any good. It just made Joe do more. He wanted her submission and he'd keep on fighting until he felt he had it. So gradually, she pressed her teeth together and learned to hush... She wasn't petal-open anymore with him. She was twenty-four and seven years married when she knew. She found that out one day when he slapped her face... he slapped Janie until she had a ringing sound in her ears and told her about her brains before he stalked on back to the store. Janie stood where he left her for unmeasured time and thought. She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over... She found that she had a host of thoughts she had never expressed to him, and numerous emotions she had never let Jody know about. Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen. She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them. (Hurston, 1937/2006, p. 84)

This passage, with its tensions between Janie's inside and outside selves, drew attention to the ways that cultural models impact identity construction. In a journal and in class discussion, students shared the "unwritten rules" ordained by cultural models that determined the ways that Janie negotiated between her inside and outside selves:

- Always be ladylike. Don't speak back. Talk only to the privileged. (Nathan)
- Be quiet, be submissive, don't talk to people, tie your hair up, wear finer clothes. (Angela)
- Not really having any fun, complete opposite of how she herself acts, free. (Amy)
- Running away is frowned upon and no one will love her if she does, love and marry into wealth. (Abigail)

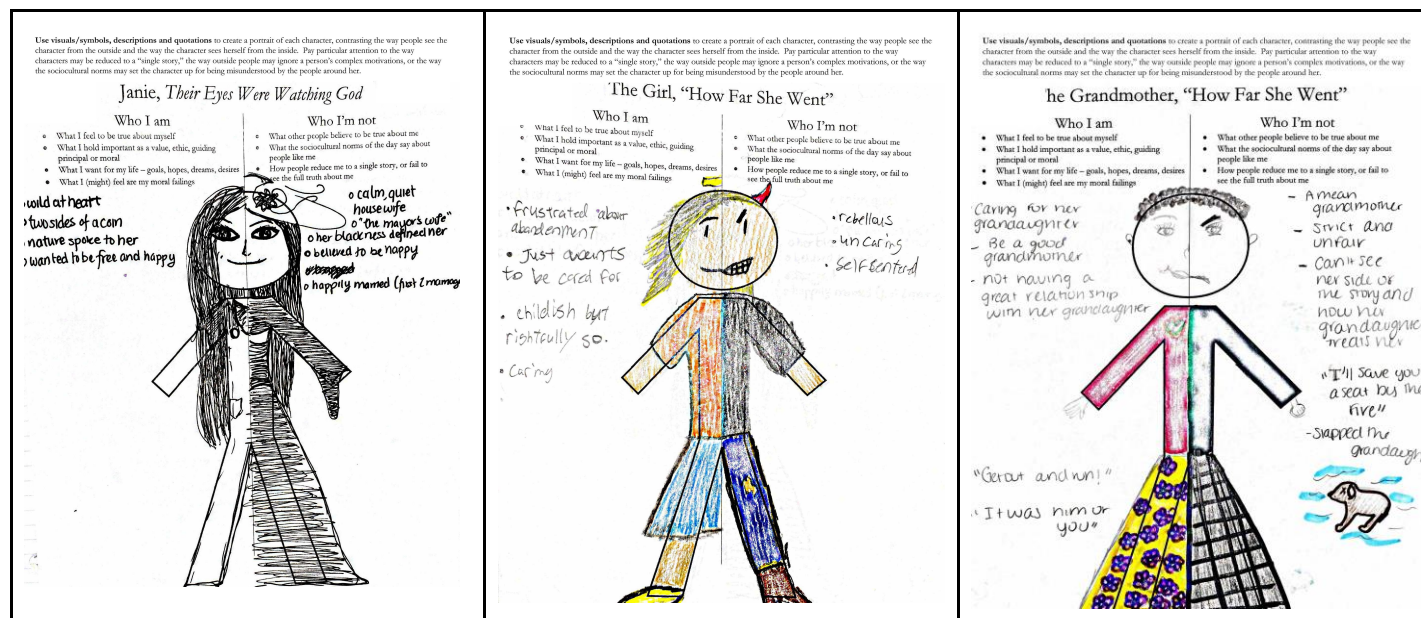
- Don't speak unless spoken to, behave how you're told (Hannah)
- Follow cultural norms; please her [grand]mother; inspire the other people of Eatonville (Chris)
- Attend to your husband's needs; dress covering up; love who you're told to love (Faith)

Discourses of class and gender underlie the way that students perceived Janie as being impelled to censor her free spirit for social acceptance – most immediately from her husband and then implicitly from the expectations of the town and her family. The appearance of wealth and the trappings of ambition, mostly Joe's, means giving up Janie's other pursuits, those more directly connected to her inner identity. For students grappling with the pressures of college admissions ambitions (either their own or their parents), Janie's withdrawal and oppression under the pressure of Joe's ambitions to fit the image of mayor and mayor's wife proved relatable.

However, students also noted that her inner self remained intact, just hidden. Students' affiliation with Janie comes from her ability to navigate delimiting discourses, to comply when she has no real options but to preserve the inside self for times when she can escape from all the pressures to be Mrs. Joe Starks.

As a companion text to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hood's (1984) short story "How Far She Went" also centers on negotiations of identity. The relationship between the grandmother and her abandoned teenage granddaughter breaks down from the ways that the women hide away from each other the inner selves, hurt by the losses they have experienced. Crisis and conflict in the story bring catharsis and reconciliation between the characters, in parallel with the way that Janie's loss of Tea Cake gives her a chance to bridge her inner and outer selves. For students, this text pairing allowed them to consider the way characters move between multi-faceted identities, and they used this view of identity as improvisatory and emergent to illustrate characters' inner and outer selves:

Figure 7. Students' illustrations for "Who I Am/Who I'm Not" assignment
(see Appendix H for larger images):



At the time of this activity, the classroom seemed chaotic with groups of six subdividing into partnerships, each one working to analyze one of the three characters, then coming back together to synthesize their evidence and ideas. However, as I look back on the groups' writing, I see not exactly the degree of depth I had hoped for, but I do see that the pairing of these texts did encourage students to look at identity construction in ways more nuanced than the false binary of individuality and conformity. In the following synthesis writings (that accompanied the illustrations), students reflected on the ways that the tensions between identity construction and restriction, and the materials from the social or natural environment that impact sense of self:

Janie and the girl's senses of self are distorted by society in that neither of them are allowed to be who they want, in turn making them feel as if something is wrong with them... At the end of both stories, the girl and Janie return back to their homes. I think they both enjoyed their journeys, but realized they made mistakes along the way. Society constantly tries to shape us, and we see in the stories how easily it happens. The girl from the story doesn't have a home, so she gives in to the shaping of society to find that. (Faith and Abigail)

Like nature, Janie was always changing... Nature is a never-ending and always changing event just like Janie's life... For Janie, it helped her because it gave her a place to connect

with God, while nature helped the girl and grandmother escape from motorcyclists. Like the boardwalk that the grandmother hid under with the girl, it was sturdy like the grandmother and her actions of protecting herself and the girl. (Hannah, Chris, and Dylan)

Your identity can be developed through the environment, and sometimes influence your personality extremely. In “How Far She Went,” the grandma went from average grandmama to survival of the fittest, Hunger Games grandma. The girl went from church girl to crazy biker devil chick due to her surroundings. The girl does not have much say in her sense of self because her direction is guided by whoever is controlling it, be it the biker or her grandma. In the exchange between the grandma, the girl does not state her opinion but goes with her grandma because she is a figure of authority to her. Who you surround yourself [with] also affects who you are. Janie’s neoconservative relationship kept Janie from being free, the girl’s destructive relationship change her morals. (Eric and Zachary)

As students observed characters drawing on the environment to shape their identity, and also the environment taking control and shaping the character, perhaps the most valuable realization was that identity construction is a process. To borrow from Hannah, Chris and Dylan’s writing, identity construction is a “never-ending and always changing event,” whereby people continually shape themselves through the means of the social environment, negotiating what identities to express or perform and what identities to hold for later. In more simplistic models of identity construction as in Transcendental and Romantic texts that posit individuality as an inner kernel of truth, a sacrosanct originality needing to be expressed, one simply needs to express that truth (Wertsch, 1998). In this more sociocultural view of identity, students noticed that identity is a negotiation or a transaction between the individual and the environment, where a person’s many different identities come to play depending on the particularities of the social context. For Janie, she moves between the repressed, obedient housewife, the nature lover and free spirit, the romantic adventurer; for the grandmother, she, based on the demands of the social context (rising up to meet the threats of a misogynistic biker gang), moves between what appears to be a typical grandmother (gardener, conservative, Bible-reader, grave-tender) to what Zachary and Eric call

“survival of the fittest, Hunger Games grandma,” in her seemingly fearless challenge to the oppressive male hierarchy to protect her granddaughter. Moving between identities suggests that characters may gain agency when they elect which identity matches the sociocultural demands of the environment. In school, so many teens may think that they have to permanently bury their interests, passions, personalities in service of grades, GPAs and college prospects. But like Janie, they may just have to put parts of themselves underground for safe keeping, for expression in another social context. Even better would be classrooms that open a space for the expression, though fleeting, of these alternate selves. In reading texts that show teens and young adults confronting cultural models that may limit identity construction, teens may find role models for ways to circumvent delimiting norms in their own lives.

In their work with students in two San Francisco Bay Area high schools, Beach, Johnston and Thein (2015) note that institutional labeling may impact students so completely (students labeled and perceived as lazy or remedial, or inversely as assiduous or accelerated) that students may begin to see these labels as intrinsically fixed and determinate; they may not even attempt to express selves outside of these labels or recognize that they could negotiate other possible ways of being within the school setting. In writing assignments that encourage students to express “multiple and contrasting aspects of themselves,” students may see the classroom as a space that invites multitudinous facets of their lives. Free(er)-form, identity-centered writing could open a space for repositioning their participation and interaction in the classroom (Beach, Johnston and Thein, 2015, p. 110). In this unit, I included opportunities for students to write reflectively and creatively to imagine “as if” alternatives to typical school work and typical school selves. This work tended to be the most successful part of the unit, though students initially struggled with the idea that they could write in freer and more self-selected ways. Frequently on these days,

students questioned the purpose of these assignments, wondering why they were writing a short story or a poem rather than taking a quiz.

However, Davis and Harré (1999) point out that positioning is not fixed to one narrative, with agents taking only prescribed roles, but rather it emerges as an unfolding improvisation that they term a “lived narrative,” one that can

change direction and meaning in ways entirely surprising to the participants to such an extent that the metaphor of a prestructured play begins to lose plausibility as a viable image to explain what it is that we do in interaction with each other. If we are to come close to understanding how it is that people actually interact in everyday life we need the metaphor of an unfolding narrative, in which we are constituted in one position or another within the course of one story, or even come to stand in multiple or contradictory positions, or to negotiate a new position by ‘refusing’ the position that the opening rounds of conversation have made available to us. (p. 42)

Literacy events that go beyond prescribed assignments and ways of thinking could allow for the forms of lived narratives through which students can renegotiate the way school positions their identity and perspectives, allowing students to be recognized in multitudinous ways. In their poems, some students challenged the school narratives that stabilize these prestructured narratives of academic success.

In Eric’s “I Am Not” poem he confronts perceptions of lethargy and indifference. From a meritocratic perspective that reifies vigorous academic competition, Eric might appear as another teenage slacker in his daily uniform of shoulder-length wavy hair, vintage band tee shirts, slouchy jeans or corduroys. But his life is full of creative endeavors – his band is well-known in the school for its witty songwriting, androgynous persona, and frequent appearances at local dive music spaces catering to garage bands. In his poem, Eric takes issue with academic structures that call for prescribed academic activity -- the AP courses loaded with reading, homework and exams -- crowding out all time and mental space for more individualistic ambition:

I am not lazy

I might have a hard time finding inspiration but I am creative and passionate.

I cannot get my required 8 hours of sleep every night because 16 hours is not enough to accomplish everything I want to get done in the day. I have school, a job, friends, hobbies, and dreams that jam pack my life. However my mom still says that I am lazy because I forgot to take the garbage out.

I am not lazy.

I might have a hard time finding motivation but when I do I... (erasure) --

Eric describes school as a place where he balances many purposes: learning, connecting with friends, pursuing his passions and dreams. In my class, Eric showed himself to be a good student, perhaps not the overly ambitious type that worries over every assignment. Some teachers who expect zealous single-mindedness may read his casual attitude as apathy. However, his work showed depth of thought, eloquence, and often humor. I call Eric and his group of friends in the class, Xavier and Zachary, the witty iconoclasts for their sardonic attitudes toward most activity; their refusal to comply with serious attitudes toward school hints at the problems of school structures that often do not allow students to renegotiate forms of participation. In the hanging ending in the last line of the poem (that Eric wrote and then erased), Eric seems to at once reject and lean into meritocratic positioning that leads to perceptions of him as lazy and unmotivated, mocking and taking control of those very perceptions. When I talked to Eric later about this erasure, he described it as a joke, a way to play with the idea of laziness – to mock the idea of what it means to be a dedicated student by ironically reaffirming perceptions of him as lazy. The erasure itself shows how wrong teachers can read students' levels of participation. Because we see students like Eric as lazy or apathetic, we miss all the other ways that he quite energetically spends his time (making and writing music, promoting his band, networking with venue owners and music promoters). If Eric were permitted to use school activity and literacy events as a way to do “everything [he] want[s] to get done in a day,” if he were allowed to use school as part of

his unfolding life narrative to explore these passions, he might not need to rely on this irreverence with which he repositions his participation in school through ironic nonparticipation in the overly competitive meritocracy.

Students also challenged the ways that academic structures impact social positioning. In his “I Am Not” poem, Lucas challenged the way his peers misconstrue his identity because of the way he goes through his school day. In school, he is quiet and reserved, never speaking in whole-class discussion and seldom in small-group discussions. Outside of school he works on cars and boats, and he wishes that school gave him time to work on these interests. What frustrates him is the way his peers assume that the identity that he performs at school is his only sense of self:

I am not quiet.
People believe I’m quiet because I don’t answer questions in class.
It bothers me because this limits them because they don’t wanna come talk to me because they believe I don’t wanna come talk to them.
I am loud.
People who know me think I’m crazy and loud.
School and classes don’t interest me that’s why I don’t talk and answer questions.
People need to believe that people who are quiet are people that just aren’t interested in what’s going on

The positioning based on academic performance takes on a double impact as students assume Lucas has nothing to say based on his silent role in the class, and in turn, they do not initiate conversation with him because of those assumptions. In this way, his position in the class thickens and becomes more intractable (Holland and Lave, 2001). As Lucas renegotiates this positioning, he turns the table on his peers, arguing that their assumptions limit not him, but instead it “limits them.” It is his peers who miss the way he sees himself, as “crazy and loud.” Literacy events that allow students to resist and to challenge these assumptions may prevent the type of internalization that Beach, Johnston and Thein (2015) see as students not seeing

themselves as anything other than a deterministic, institutional label.

Some students also looked beyond academic positioning and challenged racial and cultural discourses that limited their emergent identities; they considered the way that others expected them to act out stereotypical cultural norms. Zachary, a student who affiliates with Eric and Xavier, looks for the humor in most classroom activities, and even tries to make it when he cannot find it, took on the stereotypes associated with his biracial identity; he examined how his heritage shapes how peers and teachers expect him to act out those identities:

I am not Blasian
 I am not just stereotypical
 I love hip hop, I'm black but I'm expected to be lyrical...
 I'm not working on a mix tape
 I'm not a product of a rape
 This is just who I am, there is no escape
 I'm a Black Jap
 Expected to be a genius who can rap...
 Where I came from is not who I am
 But still pay respect to the fam
 I love my multiple cultures
 But you won't stop even if I'm dead like you were vulture
 Stop trying to shape me 'cause I'm not a sculpture
 You can give me a label
 But it's all made up and you're stuck in a fable
 But I live in High Def, satellite no cable
 I am not Blasian, I'm just blazin

In his poem, Zachary affirms and even embraces the cultural forms associated with his heredity, but he challenges the way that others use those cultural forms to pigeonhole him into one way of being. In trying to figure him out, peers and teachers “expected” him to be both an Asian genius and a Black rapper. But he also gains a sense of power in resisting those one-dimensional expectations when he suggests that those expectations say more about the one that expects something of him than what they say about him. When others try to “shape” him according to

their narrow-minded expectations, he proclaims that they are “stuck in a fable,” an outdated way of reducing people to fixed and deterministic types. He seems to draw on a sociocultural model for thinking about his identity, where he can draw on his biracial cultures as assets, and can move between social worlds, shaping his identity according to the social world he enters and choosing the self that he performs according to the context of those social situations.

As students begin to conceptualize identity as a construction, a performance and a negotiation, it gives them tools to deal with the forces that attempt to limit or shape them. More than anything in this unit, I found it powerful to see students grapple with identity in this way – to look at characters developing identity against a sociocultural backdrop (Janie in particular), and to consider their own sociocultural development. Students began to see the *telos* of school as just one more sociocultural world, a channeling of their social futures toward the ideal of college. Once students have the critical lens to see identity in terms of a sociocultural construction, they gain a chance to renegotiate the way school positions them. Returning to Beach, Johnston, and Thein’s (2015) metaphor of fish swimming unknowingly in a tide pushing them toward an unseen destination, I see now that the unit did allow students to better understand the direction of those social worlds as an invisible positioning, even if one classroom across one month can do little to change the school’s dominant definition of success or open varying definitions. Students in their writing did become more aware of the water in which they swim – the institutional worlds that shape the school’s definition of success, patterns of competition, sense of belonging and exclusion, ways of being. As students resist the social worlds that shape them, they might find that “as if” alternative to subvert limiting labels and engage in more multifaceted forms of self-making (Urrieta, 2007).

Chapter Summary

Despite its many, many shortcomings, the real value of this unit’s pedagogical design

came in the way that students shifted their thinking about identity. From our unit on 19th century transcendentalism earlier in the school year when students wrote about self as a singular truth to now, they showed more nuance in their thinking about self and others. I see potential in their writing – as they think through how they engage in self-making and how they draw on sociocultural tools and materials, students may find more improvisatory and flexible ways to construct and negotiate their senses of self across the various social worlds they move between. As fish become aware of the water, they can swim with and against the current. As their perspectives widen to see the ways that institutional and social forces shape actions and ways of being, I hope that students begin to see one another with greater understanding, and become less likely to see only instant assumptions. However, the real challenges in dialogic pedagogy are those that play out in the social plane – the rigidities that come from rank-and-sort institutional structures, and the social groupings and exchanges that stem from those structures govern almost every classroom interaction. As I continue to work with dialogic pedagogies, I continue to seek the carnivalesque atmosphere where students can set aside those competitive structures and simply converse across their perceived differences. The effort is worth it.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

This fall, several months after the hectic spotlight of my dissertation study faded, I found myself in a middle territory – no longer on the slippery edge of innovative pedagogical design and not quite back on the comfortable plain of traditional teaching. Still drawing on the principles of dialogic literary practices but not quite as noticeably, I worried that my classroom would return to the status quo, of passive though possibly more organized and rigorous pedagogies. We were studying American Transcendentalism through stalwart essays from Emerson and Thoreau, the Vietnam-era play *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* by Lawrence and Lee (1969), the young adult novel *Being Henry David* by Cal Armistead (2013), with a dash of Yoda, Pink Floyd, Red Hot Chili Peppers thrown in for good measure. My classes had also spent some time discussing the increasingly heated run-up to the 2016 presidential election, wondering if it was possible to be optimistic or idealistic in times that often seem so contentious. Discussions were mostly lively, but the participatory energy had regressed to the vocal one-third of the class typically participating, and me moderating students' responses.

We neared the passage in *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* when Thoreau served as a school teacher (one of my favorite passages, no less for the line “Being a teacher is like being in jail; once it’s on your record, you can never get rid of it,” though it never gets much of a laugh from my students). We began to more closely consider Henry’s approach to teaching and his relationship with his students through the “huckleberrying” metaphor that posits learning as an act of searching self-discovery: “We’re scrambling for ideas the way we hunt for huckleberries in the woods... meeting a huckleberry makes you more of an expert than any botanist who ever wrote a dull book” (Lawrence and Lee, 1969, p. 18, 74). As students put together the parts of the metaphor to gain a fuller understanding of the Transcendental approach to education as direct

and immersive, there came one of those moments that stick with teachers for years. A student raised his hand and said, “Huckleberrying is what we do in this class, where we talk and search around for what things mean.” Not by a long shot do I think my class even vaguely reaches the sort of self-discovery that Henry would consider “huckleberrying” (and no other students rushed in to agree with him either). But the comment all the same will remain with me for years to come. To have even one student think that our class discussions allow students the chance to grapple for understanding and co-construct knowledge, well, it still brings a pang to my heart. The ethos conveyed by the huckleberrying metaphor is exactly what I hope to foster through dialogic literacy practices, and it makes me realize even more how worth the effort it is to create spaces for students to engage in perspective-widening dialogue.

Over the course of this long, long study, I have learned so much and changed so fundamentally as a teacher. Even if my teaching itself looks vaguely similar on some days, as real change comes oh so slowly, the way I think of my students, and the way I see the structures of schooling bears no resemblance to the way I thought of school before I began my doctoral work. I see my students contending with the institutional norms and teleological purposes that inform nearly every aspect of their social worlds – how they see themselves, how they form relationships, how they see their peers, how they think of their futures, how they approach their education. My perspective, I think, has been widened the most of all. For me, that is the source of greatest growth and also continual realization that I have so much more to learn. When I started this study, I took up the stance of the *bricoleur*, the tinkerer, adapting and repurposing educational theory to engineer new approaches for my classroom and beyond. As I think of how this work will continue to guide my teaching, it is this stance of engineering as a process of continual learning, experimentation, reflection, and reinvention. Even as I complete this study, I

see it as a pause rather than a full stop, a chance to take stock of what I have learned and take on the next design and adaptation.

Summary of Results: The Failures and Successes of the Instructional Design

The purpose of this study started with the goal of understanding the social worlds that students navigate through the intersection of cultural models, institutional structures, social affiliations, and individual development – and in turn to help students recognize how their identities, goals, and futures may be shaped by these social worlds. Through the course of the pedagogical design, students engaged (mostly) in dialogic literacies to consider how characters in literature and they themselves construct identities in negotiation with the sociocultural environment. But competitive schooling deeply impacts the social patterns of classroom life, and despite many different grouping strategies, our discussions often failed to break through the social stratifications promoted by institutional tracking. Phelan, Davidson, and Cao (1994) noted that students of different academic groups (border-crossing groups who merge the social worlds in and out of school and border-resisting students who do not) seldom cross the border to interact with one another. It would sometimes seem as if these two groups of students dwelled in different worlds, even within the same classroom.

From the half-class discussion when students from divergent social groups refused to intermingle (Whole-Class Discussion, April 12) to the Socratic seminar that turned argument (May 18) to the subtle and not-so-subtle ways students resisted dialogue across the academic divide, the line of demarcation proved the most significant obstacle to creating the kind of classroom space that breaks free from hegemonic structures. Even when students discussed the pressures of school, they tended to stabilize academic tracks: high-level students seeing school

only from their perspective of privilege and pressure (Socratic seminar, May 17) and even on-level students defending the very structures that sort and rank them (Writing Samples, April 27).

Despite the struggles to find a discussion format that would break through the deep-rooted social stratification, the way students engaged in dialogue improved over the course of the unit. With talk becoming a central practice and expected activity in the class, the timidity and hesitancy that undermine class discussions eased. In keeping with Smagorinsky's (2011) concept of "exploratory speech," the power dynamic in discussion shifts from the certainty of "final draft" speech (where teachers' expertise takes the central role) to students who freed from final draft speech begin to collectively grapple with concepts and views (p. 85). Freed from the pressure of being right and the risk of being wrong, students began to put themselves out on a limb, venturing contingent and emergent views.

In one of our last whole-class discussions, students took on the difficult task of trying to make sense of Holden Caulfield's breakdown in Salinger's (1951) *Catcher in the Rye*. It is a book that paradoxically frustrates and irritates the students at Pruitt, since they often voice the same sense of alienation and disenfranchisement as he does. However, on May 3, the last real day of discussion (before the class paused for the state End-of-Course exam and the class finished with individual work and Socratic seminars) showed promise that dialogic activity can give students interpretational agency and ownership; they spoke openly and forthrightly, and in turn collaborated to make sense of Holden's breakdown in the book. In the discussion, more students participated and grappled through six key passages near the end of the book (see Appendix I for pair activity and work samples). Students engaged in a good degree of uptake from student to student, and expressed both strength and tentativeness in their views of Holden. These markers of dialogic activity suggest that the classroom community had moved toward a

safe space where students could share their emergent ideas without fear of being judged (by the teacher or perhaps more significantly by their peers). The discussion starts with the last chapter of the novel, and with the question of whether the readers concludes the book with a sense of hope for Holden:

- MS. BOWEN – So with that in mind [after reading the last paragraph of the book], do you think there is hope for Holden? Do you think he is going to figure it out? Tray, then David (*responding to raised hands*) (1)
- TRAY – I don't think there is hope for him because after his reflection and the retelling of what happened, you would think that he would have come to some sort of conclusion about how he feels about the events that have happened. But still he says, "I don't even know." (2)
- MS. BOWEN – Yeah, you would think that after having told the story of the book that he would have some clarity. David? (3)
- DAVID – Yeah, like Tray was saying, he just doesn't seem to go anywhere after what he has said. He seems to still be going backwards, even when people ask him, "are you going to apply yourself when you get out," he thinks that is a stupid idea. He seems to say that he might repeat the same thing all over again. (4)
- MS. BOWEN – So you think he is going to go back to school and the same things are going to happen to him? Bryan? (5)
- BRYAN – I feel like there is hope for him. Even if he is immature, and people go through the phase where they don't really know what they want to do. I feel like eventually somehow, somewhere he will get to that point where he will figure it out eventually. He may go back to the places that he is missing. (6)
- MS. BOWEN – That is really interesting, the missing. Did anyone find it important that he is missing Stradlater and Ackley? (7)
- DR. PEART – And Maurice (8)
- MS. BOWEN – Yeah, and Maurice, the pimp that beat him up. I don't know. What do you make of the fact that Holden misses the things that he has been running away from? (9)

- DAVID – I mean it shows that he can still think about people in a good light, like just because Maurice beat him up, he doesn't think the guy is a bad person in general. I mean it was a bad thing to do but... (*trails off*) (10)
- BRYAN – I feel like he is still so isolated and doesn't have many friends, so like even though these people are not exactly nice to him, he still holds onto those connections. (11)
- REAGAN – He could still be thinking about those moments in time when he was together with Stradlater and Ackley. And they weren't questioning him like the teachers were... (12)
- MS. BOWEN – (*after reading the passage when Holden imagines that he cannot make it across the street without Allie's help*) Oh Holden. So it seems like when Holden is at his lowest, he thinks about one of three people – Allie, Jane or Phoebe. Why do you think he thinks of them? (*responding to raised hands*) Hannah? Then Xavier? (13)
- HANNAH – Well, he loves them, they are really the only people that he cares about. So I guess that even though they may do things that he doesn't agree with, he doesn't mind it as much as when it is someone else (14)
- XAVIER – They are the ones that he talks to when he is feeling so down, he relates to them, in comparison to Ackley and Stradlater that he thinks are phonies, he thinks they are real. (15)
- CHRIS – Well I think is because he grew up with them. He grew up with Allie and Phoebe and Jane. And so Ackley and Stradlater are his friends but he didn't necessarily grow up with them (16)
- REBECCA – There are no more constants for him. He likes the museum because it never changes. He has been going there since he was a little kid, and he know it will be the same. Just like the way he thinks of Allie and Jane, they never change. When you go off to boarding school, all your classes are different each day, and college later, everything changes again. (17)
- HANNAH – I think it is like what Chris said is that if you grow up with them, they are all innocent, and he is trying to preserve that because he always sees the worst in people so if he thinks that he can focus on the good in them then that is better than to just (18)

call, like if he called Jane, he would find out that she has changed, from what she used to be

As I listened to this discussion again months after that day in May, I found more reasons for optimism than I felt during the course of the study. Students participating in the discussion varied across three or four friend groups, with participants frequently adding to a comment made by their peers regardless of their social affiliation. They also managed to pull together several parts of the book to answer that fundamental question of whether Holden would be okay: they considered his relationships with family and peers and teachers, and what these relationships mean to him; they hinted at his struggles with the norms of the 1950s, bristling against the expectations of parents and teachers; they broached the difficulty of change, and the way teens stand on the cliff imagining their futures with both trepidation and elation, just as Holden imagines the future he faces at the end of the book. Though they do not explicitly make personal connections from Holden to their own lives, the discussion has a profoundly human quality that many discussions lack. The participants seem to go beyond the simple rereading of Holden's actions, and they seem to consider the life he leads, and the way Holden's struggles might also relate to some of the ways that they live their own lives. I find much reason for hope that dialogic practices can continue to break through the walls of resistance and create the kinds of classroom communities where students engage in the types of conversations where they come to see their ideas as valued, important and influential.

Perspectives Gained from Considering Classrooms as Social Worlds

Creating a classroom community where students share emergent ideas helps to foster a sense of ownership. But the goal of dialogic practices is more than engaged discussions, the real purpose is to create a social world that refigures the patterns of participation typical of most classrooms, which could allow students to reposition themselves outside the hierarchical

structures of tracking (Holland et al., 1998; Urrieta, 2007; Fecho, 2011). However, these positions, thickened over years of competitive schooling, prove difficult to refigure. Nonetheless, creating classroom spaces that allow for wider paths to participation and more definitions of success is worth the effort, despite the difficulties. What I see more clearly from the successes and failures of the study are the ways I can continue to innovate literacy practices to support more participatory and dialogic classroom spaces.

Literacy practices that support identity construction and negotiation

For high school juniors on the brink of adulthood and college admissions, their identities at school have long been informed by the social and institutional patterns of competitive schooling. So much of some students' school day is spent in the performance of those identities: in their negotiations with teachers, in the exchanges with friends in their social circles and in interactions with peers outside those circles, in their approach to the stresses of assignments and grades. As in Phelan, Cao, and Davidson's (1994) typology of students engaging in border-crossing between the social worlds in and out of school, so many students must choose to leave essential parts of their identities at the door when they come to school. But the worst part is the degree to which many students remain unaware of the sociocultural forces that play into identity construction. Drawing on sociocultural theories to examine identity, agency and social worlds, these identity-focused literacy practices see human action against the backdrop of the social worlds that people navigate (Beach, Parks & Thein, 2003).

One of the most revelatory aspects of the study is the way students began to draw on social worlds theory to look at the actions of characters written across wildly different time periods and social climates: some students considered Janie's longing for power as a heroic struggle against the forces of misogyny and racism (Hurstun, 1937); other students understood

Krebs' battle with post-traumatic stress disorder against a conformist society that expected him to "man up" and to get a job (Hemingway, 1925); and yet other students conceptualized A's gender identity as emergent and contextual (Levithan, 2012). With each of these texts, students grappled with the intersection of cultural, social, and personal influences – and they conceptualized identity as emergent and contingent. Students begin to track a character's sense of identity as fluid, shifting across several different social contexts. For example, Holden performs vastly different identities in his interaction with Mr. Spencer in his parlor, with Stradlater and Ackley in the dorm, with Mrs. Morrow on the train, with the various bartenders, pimps, and taxi drivers, and finally with Phoebe. In each of these contexts, Holden draws on the expectations and patterns of the social scene; he is positioned and he positions others based on these social norms. As students observe Holden's negotiation of these social worlds, they too begin to see their own identity construction as a negotiation, as a constantly unfolding of the self they portray to others and the self they hold for other contexts.

This model may also give students the analytical lens to help them come to terms with the institutional expectations that limit their identity construction within the academic scene; to observe the way that students themselves are positioned by the school and the broader society gives students a greater sense of power and control in the systems that may advantage or marginalize them. As students read and write with an eye on identity construction, they assert their identities – those in and out of school – more freely. Giving students sanction to write about their lives in both formal and informal assignments does not compromise the quality of the writing. It helps students navigate a sense of purpose and intent; it allows them to discern the appropriate time and place to write about their own lives. But especially for students who feel marginalized by a school's hierarchy, writing without personal investment becomes one more

example of the way the school excludes their senses of self. As I move through another school year and continue to innovate teaching approaches that speak to all my students, I continue to concentrate on identity-focused literacy practices for their potential to reframe my classroom as a student-centered space for self-authoring, and for understanding the negotiation between self and social world.

Classroom communities that destabilize social stratification

Over the course of the study, I put much hope in the classroom community that would ease the lines of demarcation between students of conflicting social groups, especially those divides grounded in academic hierarchies. Though this part of the study proved the most difficult to effect, I still see potential that participatory classrooms can reduce social strata. Dialogic classrooms that shift the center of power from teacher-centered to student-centered authority hold the potential to also shift the typical social hierarchies at play in the classroom. Without the teacher as moderator or arbiter, the social positioning that centers on performance eases – students may begin to engage in dialogue only in service of the dialogue, without looking to the teacher for points or for confirmation. Accordingly, the mental scoreboard that many students maintain in competition with their peers, especially among highly ambitious students, can take a break, along with the constant jockeying for academic position.

As students take power in a dialogic classroom, the role of the teacher shifts away from moderator to collaborator. The ups and downs of the Holden Caulfield discussion (and many of the other whole-class discussions in the study) shows how the teacher moderating the discussion can have a deleterious effect on the purposeful energy and participation in the discussion. Dr. Peart and I had intentionally seated ourselves outside the circle, hoping that students would moderate discussion without our presence. But over and over again, I insert myself into

discussion to moderate, to add comments, to pose follow-up questions, sometimes in ways that promote more contributions, but more often in ways that diminish the authenticity of the discussion, that pulls it back from a conversation to a classwork assignment. As in Caughlin and Kelly's (2004) study of one teacher's controlling moderation in an on-level class in contrast with the same teacher's more free-form collaboration in the teacher's honors classes, my participation in the class often took the textual authority and response from the students in service of some predesigned answer. Even in the discussions when the goal is personal response to the text, students seldom have the opportunity to set the agenda for discussion. Students see the pseudo-authenticity of these discussions; they know they have no real sanction to hold the floor and control the topic of conversation. Acculturated to this falsity after eleven years of comprehension-checking discussion, students see these class discussions as only monologic, a form of call-and-response that follows the teacher's goals rather than their own.

The more my classroom moved toward dialogic possibility, the more I saw the importance of giving students space to work through discussions that may flag or flounder, but students need the opportunity to redirect conversation and to devise follow-up questions. Given the authority to control textual interpretation and to moderate discussions, students may learn to take responsibility for bringing all their peers into the conversation. A climate of trust and respect may develop between peers as they recognize that they are entrusted with their own readings and thinking. As I continue to move my classroom toward these inclusive practices where students collaborate across social groups, the closer it seems a reality that student-guided talk can bring more and more students into dialogue regardless of academic level, friend group, belief system or ideology.

Institutional structures modulated by wider pathways to participation

It is almost impossible to imagine a classroom where the institutional structures of points and assignments, grades and GPAs do not moderate the pathway to participation, where the community itself encourages a sense of belonging with the benefits that come from sharing perspectives and constructing knowledge among peers standing on even footing. And the course of this study only made subtle changes to grades-motivated participation; however, I hope to continue to subject my teaching to critical inquiry and consider the assignments that truly measure learning and the assignments that only maintain class ranks. For me, the real epiphany about assignments came when I started trying to control the war poetry discussions out of fear that the classroom had lost its sense of rigor. The question of rigor, I think, will be an ongoing one for me, as I try to discern how to measure learning and reward effort through grades but to ease the patterns of privilege and relegation that grades convey. Wagner (2006) contends that the current focus on rigor results in high levels of memorization without the real rigors of critical thinking. How much of the push toward academic rigor is to serve as a gatekeeper function, to continue the historical functions of ranking and sorting?

Over the course of the study, I observed students of all academic levels impacted by the institutional push for rigor: the endless hours of homework and studying for students frantic to compete with the ratcheting expectations; the dismal grades of students who cannot compete out of apathy or hopelessness or both. As I move forward with what I have learned from the study, the most important adjustment I can make to my teaching is to consider the necessity and impact of what I assign – do assignments contribute to learning, growth, development? Do they give me a measure of what students have learned, of what students still need to learn? Or do the assignments require too much time and effort for too little development? Do the assignments

only perpetuate lines of demarcation between academic level? These are crucial questions to balance the impulse to recklessly add rigor without real developmental reward.

I hope to continue to develop more diverse ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skill. Too often students only have one opportunity – a supposedly objective test, quiz or handout that elicits facts without interpretation, analysis without commentary, text without response. Devising assessments that give students an opportunity to express themselves, their reaction to the text and their response could widen the pathway to achievement, giving more students a chance to demonstrate knowledge and build confidence. Assessment and grades, of course, remains an important aspect of classroom life, but I hope to keep a critical eye on the purposes of the assessments. With an eye on breaking down ranks rather than building them, I hope to moderate the impact of hierarchical structures and to increase the chance for willing engagement in dialogue. Keeping a focus on students' whole development not just their academics, I hope will give students a safe and nurturing community where literacy practices serve the development of students' sense of self in negotiation with the social environment and institutional structures.

Implications: Lessons Learned from Conducting Teacher-Research

As a first-time teacher-researcher, I found the process of conducting research in my classroom incredibly overwhelming and overwhelmingly fulfilling. With each problem, I tried to remember the purpose of closely observing the local context as a way of developing theory beyond the local. The Design-Based Research ethos of lived experience recognizes that most significant understandings come from real and messy contexts of actual learning, what Barab and Squire (2004) describe as a “buzzing, blooming confusion of real-life settings where most learning actually occurs” (p. 4). For teacher-researchers, the challenge of managing dual

purposes is all the more messy, as we must balance the goals of the study with our purpose in the classroom. At times, the challenge felt too much – conducting interviews during planning periods and lunches, dealing with technological glitches, making sense of the collected data. However, throughout the struggles, I marveled at the way I saw my classroom and my teaching anew. More than anything, the interviews I conducted with students gave me such a rich understanding of how my students experience life in my classroom and in school. After each interview, I thought how remarkable it would be if teachers could interview each of their students, and discover the backgrounds that underlie their attitudes in the classroom. In some ways it is the inverse of the Hawthorne effect that Brown (1992) notes as the unintended benefits that participants gain from the research process. As a teacher-researcher, I felt my view of education expand ever wider with each student I interviewed, but it also connected my classroom to the development of educational theory beyond my classroom, in keeping with design-based research's ontological purpose. According to Cochran and Lytle (1993), "We show that inquiry by individual teachers and communities of teacher researchers realigns their relationships to knowledge and to the brokers of knowledge and also necessitates a redefinition of the notion of a knowledge base for learning" (p. 43). With one eye on the students in my classroom and one eye on the theory developed beyond my classroom, I see teacher-research as a praxis of those two worlds. Even if I do not conduct formal research, I see the immense value of continuing to draw on ethnographic observation and ontological developments to see more clearly the problems plaguing my classroom, and their impact on my students.

Limitations

Within the pedagogical design, I made numerous adjustments in terms of timing and the response of students to the literacy events. But the most significant limitation that impacted how

I introduced the pedagogical design and observed its impact was time, and students' perceptions of time. As soon as testing started (with AP exams and End-of-Course tests) on May 1, the entire pace and mood of the school underwent a radical shift. Even more than a typical day, the hierarchical privileges of being an AP student seem to divide the school into high and low, and a different set of rules seems to apply to students taking AP exams. With students missing from classes each day to take AP exams and with AP teachers telling their students not to come back to class after the exam, students begin to think that the school year should already be finished, despite three more weeks of school. With the onset of testing and the proximity of summer, a sense of exhaustion and malaise overtakes the school, making in-depth inquiry more challenging.

Related to time, the duration of the study proved to be a limitation as well. Only six weeks in length, the study could have benefitted from tracking the development of classroom community with twice the time. This year, I have continued to tinker with dialogic activities, and I plan to implement the instructional unit again. I would be interested to see if students develop more meaningful dialogic practices with more time to build trust and community.

Finally, the third limitation relates to data collection. Because of the difficulties of teaching and researching at the same time, there were several days that I did not successfully collect footage, as I had to set up the camera between classes. One day, the camera zoomed in to the far wall of the classroom, showing the corner of a poster and nothing more. Another day, the video camera turned off mid-class, giving me only a few minutes of coverage. The difficulties of doing two jobs at one time make data collection more prone to error. I would also choose to interview fewer students but on several occasions. I wanted to talk to as many students who agreed to participate, but it took me so long to get through the first round of interviews (with eleven participants) that I only had time to conduct second interviews with several students. I

feel that it would prove more elucidating to talk to students at the completion of the unit to understand their response in the middle and at the completion of the unit.

Closing Thoughts

This project started three years ago, when I became concerned over the divide I saw between my students, a divide I had only begun to understand. I saw the way students on each side of the divide looked across it and often saw only what they assumed to be true about their peers on the other side. Positioned as high-achieving or low-ability or average, students sometimes come to see the selves they express at school through the lens of these institutional labels. Three years later I see more clearly how the academic divide positions students on each side, and how students may take up or reject those positions. The real promise, I believe of dialogic activity is its ability to bring into negotiation perspectives from across that divide – to voice one's experiences and to hear another's becomes the starting point for bridging that divide. For my students past, present and future, I dedicate this work to our efforts to better understand ourselves in negotiation with the social worlds we navigate.

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Appendix A: Text Selections

Phase 1 -- Tracing identity across time and social spaces

- *Everyday* by David Levithan (continuing through phases two and three)
- *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston (film study)
- “Dangers of a Single Story” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
- “Thank You Ma’am” from Langston Hughes
- “How Far She Went” by Mary Hood
- “Soldier’s Home” by Ernest Hemingway
- “Formation” by Beyoncé
- “Because It Looked Hotter That Way” by Camille Dungy
- “We Real Cool” by Gwendolyn Brooks
- Excerpts from “Identity as an analytic lens for research in education” by James Gee

Phase 2 -- Observing the construction of identity at school

- Excerpts from *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger (continuing through phase three)
- “Theme for English B” by Langston Hughes
- “I’m Sitting in My History Class” by Richard Olivas
- “Blondes Who Love Math” by Hannah Bellini
- “Snapping Beans” by Lisa Parker
- “Making Life’s Grade” by Ryan from Boulder (This I Believe essay)
- “Rethinking College Admissions” by Frank Bruni
- “How Labels Limit Us and We, In Turn, Limit Our Own Potential” by Michael Formica
- Excerpts from “The Culture of School and How It Shapes Literacy Learning” by Peter Smagorinsky
- “Modern Day Segregation in Public Schools” by Sonali Kohli
- Excerpts from *Keeping Track* by Jeannie Oakes

Phase 3 -- Considering ways to renegotiate identity and positionality

- “Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou
- “a song in the front yard” by Gwendolyn Brooks
- *Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry (film study)

Appendix B: Literacy Events and Interventions

Literacy Events in Phase 1 -- Tracing identity across time and social spaces

- **Curate representations of teenage life and identity in the media:**

Find an example of one way that the media represents teenagers (through advertisements, music, movies/television, etc.). Consider the ways that the representation shows teenage life in either its full complexity or the ways that it flattens, simplifies, and stereotypes teenage life. In what ways do those representations become part of the social worlds of teens, impacting and influencing the ways that teens construct and perform identity?

- **Discuss the way characters form identities in relation to social and cultural worlds, and the ways those social worlds may constrain their full identity (drawing on Gee's concept of identity; Beach's metaphor of the fish and the water; and Adichie's warning about the "single story")**

Choose one of three characters (the invisible man in "Battle Royale," the girl in "How Far She Went," or Krebs in "Soldier's Home"); discuss the character's levels of identity according to Gee's concept; describe what we as readers know about the character at each level of identity (N-, D-, I-, A-); make inferences if the story does not provide explicit textual support. Also consider the ways that the character may feel that he or she is being reduced to a "single story."

- **What do people say? Noting assumptions about identity as influenced by discourses**

Using the distancing phrase, "people would say..." consider the identities expressed by the individuals in the photographs as part of the Dawoud Bey's (2003) [*The Chicago Project*](#). What are the social or cultural norms that impact the way people make assumptions about each individual? What are the limitations or advantages of these norms?

- **Write a chapter for Levithan's *Everyday* in which A. comes to inhabit your life for a day**

Consider how A. would make sense of your life and identity – what artifacts, memories, relationships, social practices would he draw on to understand who you are and how you live your life? What might he most disrupt in your life if he "misread" who you are?

- **What I am – describing your identity in terms of Gee's concept of four levels of identity:**

In thinking about the ways that parts of your identity are under your control and parts that are influenced by natural, social/cultural, institutional environments, consider ways that you construct and perform your identity in these various ways. How do outside influences (think in terms of the fish and the water in Beach's metaphor) help you to construct a more truthful identity and how do outside influences keep you from being about to construct a more meaningful identity? Use colors and visuals to express

Literacy Evnets in Phase 2 – Observing the construction of identity at school

- **Your student identity in terms of the telos and the unwritten rules of Pruitt**

Describe the ways that you express your identities at Pruitt – what do you feel is most authentic about the way you express yourself at school, what is least? Thinking about what Smagorinsky writes about telos being like a channel that pushes people in a social world towards a particular notion of success, what would you describe as the telos of Pruitt, and what are the unwritten rules that lead to that notion of success? How do you feel you fit that definition of success? What parts of your identity and your competencies/talents do you wish the social worlds of Pope (teachers, peers, institutional norms) were included as part of the telos of Pruitt.

- **Just a bunch of phonies? Relating Pencey Prep to Pruitt**

Looking to their experiences of schooling at Pencey Prep (*Catcher in the Rye*), consider the ways that the social environment influences the construction and performance of identity for Holden, Stradlater, and Ackley. Reflect on the unwritten rules that impact the way these characters see themselves and see each other. In comparison, think about the unwritten rules of Pruitt, what do you see as similar or different to Pencey? How do the unwritten rules impact your own perceptions of self and others?

- **Analyzing political cartoons about affirmative action and debating the issues on college admissions**

Review a series of political cartoons for the argument and bias in each cartoon. Group them according to their stance on the issue of affirmative action. Prepare to argue the reasons for each side of the debate – as you prepare, try to really see the issue from the other side. Consider how each side of the debate would see the advantages and disadvantages of changing admission policies.

- **Debating the term “meritocracy” – is it possible for anyone to succeed if they simply work hard enough?**

We like to think that our educational system and really, our society gives anyone the chance to succeed. Using your experiences of eleven years of schooling, do you find that to be the case? What is fair and unfair about the structures of schooling? What could we change to make it fairer?

- **Arguing the advantages and disadvantages of academic levels (DBQ/synthesis writing)**

In the past few decades many schools have considered eliminating academic levels (on-level, honors, and AP), including recently the New York City public schools. Read the four articles in the New York Times “Room for Debate” on eliminating gifted classes; weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the ideas proposed in each article. In response, write an argumentative essay that argues your perspective on the issue. Use supporting evidence from the documents provided and from your own personal

experiences of schooling.

Literacy Events in Phase 3 – Considering ways to renegotiate identity and positionality

- **What I’m Not – resisting the way that social worlds may try to reduce you to a “single story”**

Consider a way that you have been perceived or labeled in the past, a way that you feel reduces you to one idea. Resist that label by describing (in poetry or prose) the way that the label fails to tell the truth about you (either fully or partially).

- **ReMixing representations of teenage life**

Drawing on the images we collected from the media (in phase one), choose several images that you want to push back on, and remix the image with other images that offer a fuller picture of teenage life today and, in particular, your teenage life. Describe how you confronted the stereotypical or limiting idea about teenage identity and what you hoped to express by mixing images together.

- **Renegotiating Identity as Agents of Change (or finding new ways to play the game)**

For A., Holden, Janie and Walter Lee, there comes a moment of epiphany when he or she realizes that the ways that the social worlds attempting to limit their senses of self can be renegotiated; if not outright changed, the rules can be bent. These characters seem to come up with “as if” possibilities for ways to imagine their life in a new light (even if it is not exactly a happy ending). What seems to be the catalyst for these changes? What do these characters gain from gaining agency and finding new ways of being?

Appendix C: Interview and Focus Group Protocol

A semi-structured interview protocol, these questions serve as a starting point for more open-ended conversation with and between participants, who will have the freedom to answer questions in their own way. The researcher will also use follow-up questions to encourage fuller, more detailed responses from participants. As the classroom teacher for nearly a year of the students involved in the study, the researcher will leverage the existing relationship with participants to ensure their comfort with the interview process and to ensure that participants know that they may refuse to answer any question. The researcher will audio record interviews and then transcribe the conversation. Researcher will involve the participants in member-checking the transcription to ensure validity and accuracy. Audio recording will be deleted after the member checking process.

Phase 1 – Tracing identity across time and social spaces

Phase one of the study introduces (in a teen-friendly way) theories of identity-construction in social worlds and asks students to reflect on their identity construction over time. They will also analyze the identity construction and social worlds of characters in literary works.

How would you describe your identity?

Do you feel your identity changes over time? Changes in different environments? In what ways?

What are the things or situations that let you most be yourself?

At what times and in what environment, do you feel you express your genuine self?

Can you describe the norms (the unwritten rules) of this social environment?

Are there times and situations when you feel you have a different identity? Can you describe how you see yourself in varying situations?

In what social environments or situations, do you feel you have been misunderstood or have been unable to express your true identity?

What are the things that keep people from being their true selves or of working towards true identities?

Phase 2 – Observing the construction of identity in school

Phase two of the study begins to introduce Gee's concept of identities influenced by cultural and institutional norms. Students will begin to analyze the way that institutional norms and cultural telos impact their construction and performance of identity. Most familiar with the institution of schooling, students will reflect on the ways that school impacts their sense of self and belonging.

What do you wish your teachers knew about you?

In what classes or times, do you feel like you were able to best express who you are?

Are there times when you have felt labeled or misunderstood in school? Can you describe those times?

What parts of your identity or what competencies/abilities do you wish were more recognized in school?

What do you see as the norms (unwritten rules) of school? How do those unwritten rules impact your sense of identity, attitudes or your actions at school?

What do you think are the ways that school impact your sense of belonging?

What would you say are the goals of school for you? How do those goals impact the way you see day-to-day life at school, and the way that you engage with school work?

How would you describe the pressures of junior year? How do those pressures impact you, and your activities at school?

Phase 3 – Considering ways to renegotiate identities

Phase three of the study looks to the power of agency to renegotiate identity across social worlds, to reimagine and put into action a more authentic sense of being. In this part of the unit, students will (attempt to) take action on the ways that their identity-construction has been limited in the past and to find more active ways to construct authentic identities

In what ways do you think you could incorporate more of your interests and competencies into school and other social environments?

What type of social environments do you find most nurturing? In what ways might you begin to contribute to a sense of community that accepts people for their differences and celebrates individuality?

Do you feel like people have power to change their response to social environments beyond their control?

What do you consider to be the most accepting and inclusive social environments?

What, if anything, have you learned from hearing other peoples' experiences with constructing identity?

Appendix D: Writing Sample Protocol

As part of typical class activities, students will write reflective journals that will make connections between class texts and discussion and the students' own experiences. These journals may speak directly to our analysis of an anchor text, or the journals may be more free-form to allow for more introspection and critical thought

Phase 1 – Tracing identity across time and social spaces

Looking at Gee's identity types (biological, social/cultural discourse, institutional, affinity), reflect on the ways that your identity is impacted by different social worlds (made up of peers but also of social norms/unwritten rules). Consider the advantages and disadvantages of thinking about your identity in each of these types – which feels most authentic, least? What is the relationship between your different identities? How have these identities developed over the course of high school?

Phase 2 – Observing the construction of identity in school

Looking to their experiences of schooling at Pencey Prep (*Catcher in the Rye*), consider the ways that social environment influences the construction and performance of identity for Holden, Stradlater, and Ackley. Reflect on the unwritten rules that impact the way these characters see themselves and see each other. In comparison, think about the unwritten rules of Pope and how they impact your own perceptions of self and others.

Phase 3 – Considering ways to renegotiate identities

What I'm Not activity -- Reflect on a label that you feel simplifies you as a person. In what ways does it fail to capture what you see to be your true self? Who or what type of people see you in this way? In what ways can you reclaim this label and resist it (arguing for fuller recognition of how you are)? How do you see your peers in class labeled and what ways do you see them renegotiate that label and identity? What can you learn, if anything, of the experiences of other people in renegotiating identity?

Appendix E: Discussion Preparation for David Levithan's *Everyday*

Everyday Round Robin Discussion

For each chapter, your group will discuss the characters developed in terms of their identity construction, relationships, values, and priorities, by looking at how A. makes sense of their lives (or fails to make sense of their lives). To make sure everyone contributes and has a chance to contribute this discussion will be more orderly than most.

- For each chapter, choose one person to start with some basic information about the characters in the chapter.
- The next person to the left should build on what the first speaker said – responding, building, adding or questioning what the first speaker contributed. The third speaker does the same, and so forth.
- The discussion should go around the circle at least once and preferably twice for each chapter
- Choose one person to take notes for each chapter.

Ways to extend your discussion –

- Start with the basic storyline, and recall what happened --- What stood out to you as you read? What stands out to you now as you look at the chapter again?
- Skim the chapter and find important passages to read again together
- Respond the text – what does this character's life make you think about your own life or the lives of your peers?
- Immerse yourself in the text – what would you do if you were A or another character?
- Look at each character in terms of how he or she constructs identity –
 - Which characters seem to have the healthiest sense of identity, the least healthy sense of identity? What seems to make the difference in how characters/people develop a sense of self?
 - How do people figure out who they are? What are the influences that people draw on to figure out what kind of person they are going to be? What influences are most helpful/healthy, least helpful/healthy?
 - What are the obstacles that each character faces?
 - Which character do you relate to the most, the least?
 - Why do you think A. begins to break his own “rules”? What problems arise from him breaking those rules?
- Take a minute to write your own discussion questions for each chapter

Appendix F(a): Stereotype Artifact Discussion Centers (Assignment)

The Not-So-Stereotypical Lives of American Teenagers

To take an anthropological perspective, you will try to understand the culture that influences people's lives through the artifacts you collected in each station. For each of these stations, you should discuss the ideas at length on the recorder, and then just jot down a few key phrases to remember what you discussed.

STATIONS 1-6

- Describe the stereotypes depicted by this group of images –
- In what way do these stereotypes reveal some partial truths? In other words what is true but incomplete? How might these stereotypes lead teens to feel they should act in certain ways? (Keep in mind what Adichie said, “the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story”)
- What do these images leave out about teenage life? In what ways do they miss the complexity about teenage life?

STATION 7 - Observe

For 10 minutes you will go out and observe *real* teenage life.

- Group will divide into two groups of two. Ask Ms. Bowen for a room number.
- Enter the room quietly, the teachers know that you are coming. Do not disturb students or talk to friends.
- As best as you can, stand back as an observer unfamiliar with life at Pruitt. Pretend you are from a different country and have no idea how an American high school works.
- Observe and take notes of what teens are doing, how they feel, how they interact with one another. Look for similarities and differences.
- Take notes below –

STATION 8 - Reclaim

Reclaim these images. After you review the following two artifacts that attempt to break down stereotypes. Go back through all the artifacts, choose one that you would like to contradict with the fuller truth. Reimagine how you could replace this image in the world with an image that reveals the fuller truth about teenage life. Sketch or describe how you would show people what teenage lives are really like.

Appendix F(b): Stereotype Artifact Discussion Centers (Student-curated images)

Teenage life in America

Taking an anthropological view to understand
the not-so-stereotypical lives of American teens

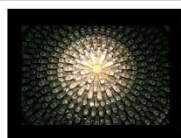
Discussion Questions for stations 1-6
(Keep scrolling until you see all the artifacts for each station,
then discuss the questions for the group of images)

Describe the stereotypes depicted by these images –

In what way do these stereotypes reveal some partial truths? In other words, what is true but incomplete? How might these stereotypes lead teens to feel they should act in certain ways? Group around what *Avatar* said, “be cautious with stereotypes or not that they are untrue, but that they are dangerous. They only see one thing because the only way?”

What do these images leave out about teenage life? In what ways do they miss the complexity about teenage life?

Station 1



Station 2



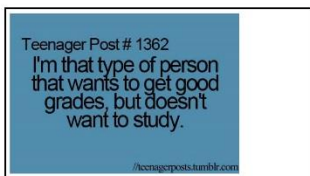


A Study Finds More Links Between TV and Violence

<http://www.cnn.com/2012/02/22/health/television-violence/index.html>



Station 3



Station 4



Station 5



<http://editionsandconsequences.weebly.com/artifacts.html>

[Pop culture influences teens through music, TV, fashion](#)



Station 6

Why Do Adults Hold Teenagers and Children in Such Low Esteem?

<http://www.research.uky.edu/odyssey/spring99/adolescents.html>



Why More Adults Need to Value Teenage Voices

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/isabel-song/teenager-misconceptions_b_5024803.html

- Group will divide into two groups of two. Ask Ms. Brown to assign number
- Pick the more quiet; the teachers know that you are coming. Do not disturb it, don't walk to friends.
- Ask if you can read him a verse in reference to sinners with the Pope. Partied you are from a different country and have read him an American high school state.
- Observe and take notes of what time everything was, how they feel, how they react with one another. Look for similarities and differences.

Reclaim these images. After you review the following two artifacts that attempt to break down stereotypes, Go back through all the artifacts, choose one that you would like to contradict with the fuller truth. Reimagine how you could replace this image in the world with an image that reveals the fuller truth about teenage life. Sketch or describe how you would show people what teenage lives are really like.



Appendix G: War Poems Discussion Assignment Scaffold

VERBAL JOURNAL – The Costs of War

- Instead of writing ☺, discuss the following questions with great depth of thought:
 - What do war writers (Hemingway, Owens, and Jarrell) need to express about the cost of war and the difficulties that soldiers face in returning to war?
 - Do you think the war writers want to change societal attitudes about war?
- Add your own discussion questions, topics and thoughts.
- Then discuss each of the three texts individually

Hemingway's "Soldier's Home"

- What ALL has Krebs lost since the war? How has he changed?
- What is Hemingway's point about war and the cost of war?
- Do you feel his point is unique to Krebs or does it apply to all soldiers?
- Refer to some of the following details in terms of how they add to the meaning –

• the history books from the library	• Charley Simmons
• the family car	• Mother crying
• the girls -- in the ice cream parlor, across the street, German/French	• references to Krebs as a baby
• the newspaper	• the prayer

Jarrell's "Death of the Ball Turret Gunner"

- What does Jarrell want the reader to see about war, and the costs of war?
- What responsibilities does a government have to its soldiers?
- Do the horrors of war, and the chaos of fighting, excuse any of the ways that governments may put their soldiers in harm's way?
- Refer to some of the following details in terms of how they add meaning to the story:

• Mother's sleep	• Nightmare fighters
• Wet fur froze	• With a hose
• Dream of life	

Owen's "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young"

- What does Owen want the reader to see about the powers/politicians that send the young men to war?
- How does he present the role of religion/the voice of God in terms of men starting wars?
- What is the effect on young men and on society of the decisions that politicians make?
- Refer to some of the following details in terms of how they add meaning to the story:

• Burnt offering	• Fire and iron
------------------	-----------------

- Parapets and trenches
- Ram of pride
- Half the seed of Europe

Make connections between the three texts – what similarities do you see in terms of the following –

- Theme/message
- Writer's purpose
- Style/tone
- Metaphors/symbols
- Impact on the reader (you and beyond you, what you infer as the impact on society)

Appendix H: Who I Am/Who I'm Not Synthesis Activity

Use visuals/symbols, descriptions and quotations to create a portrait of each character, contrasting the way people see the character from the outside and the way the character sees herself from the inside. Pay particular attention to the way characters may be reduced to a "single story," the way outside people may ignore a person's complex motivations, or the way the sociocultural norms may set the character up for being misunderstood by the people around her.

Janie, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Who I am

- What I feel to be true about myself
- What I hold important as a value, ethic, guiding principal or moral
- What I want for my life – goals, hopes, dreams, desires
- What I (might) feel are my moral failings

Who I'm not

- What other people believe to be true about me
- What the sociocultural norms of the day say about people like me
- How people reduce me to a single story, or fail to see the full truth about me

Who I am (Left Side):

- Spiritual
- "her soul crawled out from its hiding place"
- connected to God and nature
- love
- happiness
- change agent
- "Felt a self-crushing love"
- outspoken
- hopeful

Who I'm not (Right Side):

- naïve
- Obedient
- Wild Child
- "Oh'm I'm colored"
- Gullible
- Flirt
- marginalized
- "they made burning statements."

Janie

Use **visuals/symbols, descriptions and quotations** to create a portrait of each character, contrasting the way people see the character from the outside and the way the character sees herself from the inside. Pay particular attention to the way characters may be reduced to a “single story,” the way outside people may ignore a person’s complex motivations, or the way the sociocultural norms may set the character up for being misunderstood by the people around her.

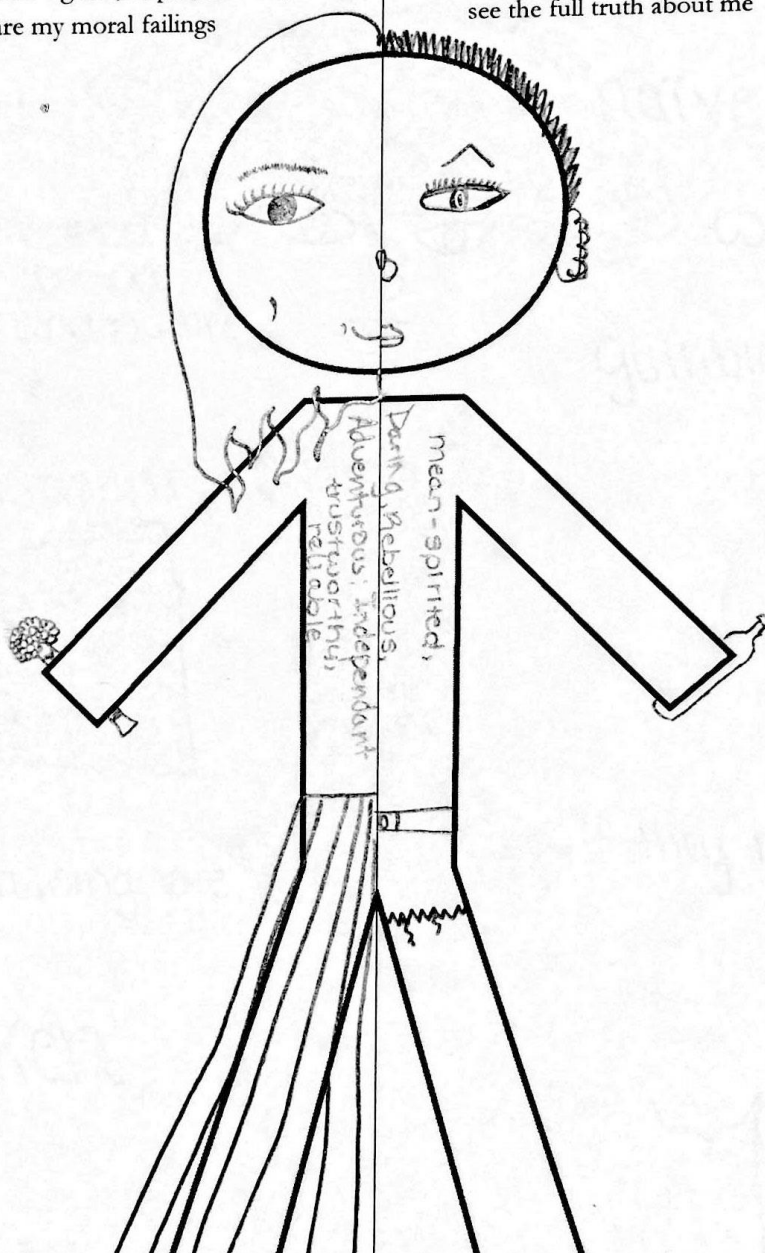
The Girl, “How Far She Went”

Who I am

- What I feel to be true about myself
- What I hold important as a value, ethic, guiding principal or moral
- What I want for my life – goals, hopes, dreams, desires
- What I (might) feel are my moral failings

Who I’m not

- What other people believe to be true about me
- What the sociocultural norms of the day say about people like me
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Use visuals/symbols, descriptions and quotations to create a portrait of each character, contrasting the way people see the character from the outside and the way the character sees herself from the inside. Pay particular attention to the way characters may be reduced to a "single story," the way outside people may ignore a person's complex motivations, or the way the sociocultural norms may set the character up for being misunderstood by the people around her.

The Grandmother, "How Far She Went"

Who I am

- What I feel to be true about myself
- What I hold important as a value, ethic, guiding principal or moral
- What I want for my life – goals, hopes, dreams, desires
- What I (might) feel are my moral failings

Caring for her granddaughter

- Be a good grandmother

- not having a great relationship with her granddaughter

"Get out and run!"

"It was him or you"

Who I'm not

- What other people believe to be true about me
- What the sociocultural norms of the day say about people like me
- How people reduce me to a single story, or fail to see the full truth about me

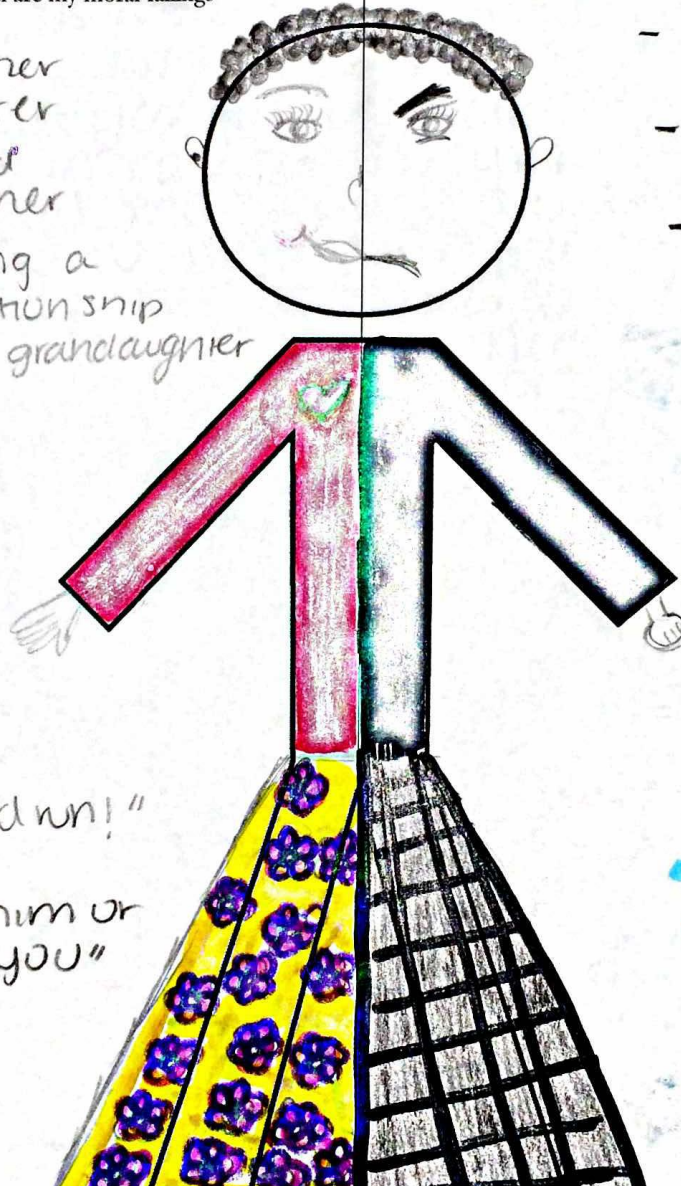
- A mean grandmother

- Strict and unfair

- Can't see her side of the story and how her granddaughter treats her

"I'll save you a seat by the fire"

- Slapped the granddaughter



Use visuals/symbols, descriptions and quotations to create a portrait of each character, contrasting the way people see the character from the outside and the way the character sees herself from the inside. Pay particular attention to the way characters may be reduced to a "single story," the way outside people may ignore a person's complex motivations, or the way the sociocultural norms may set the character up for being misunderstood by the people around her.

Janie, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Who I am

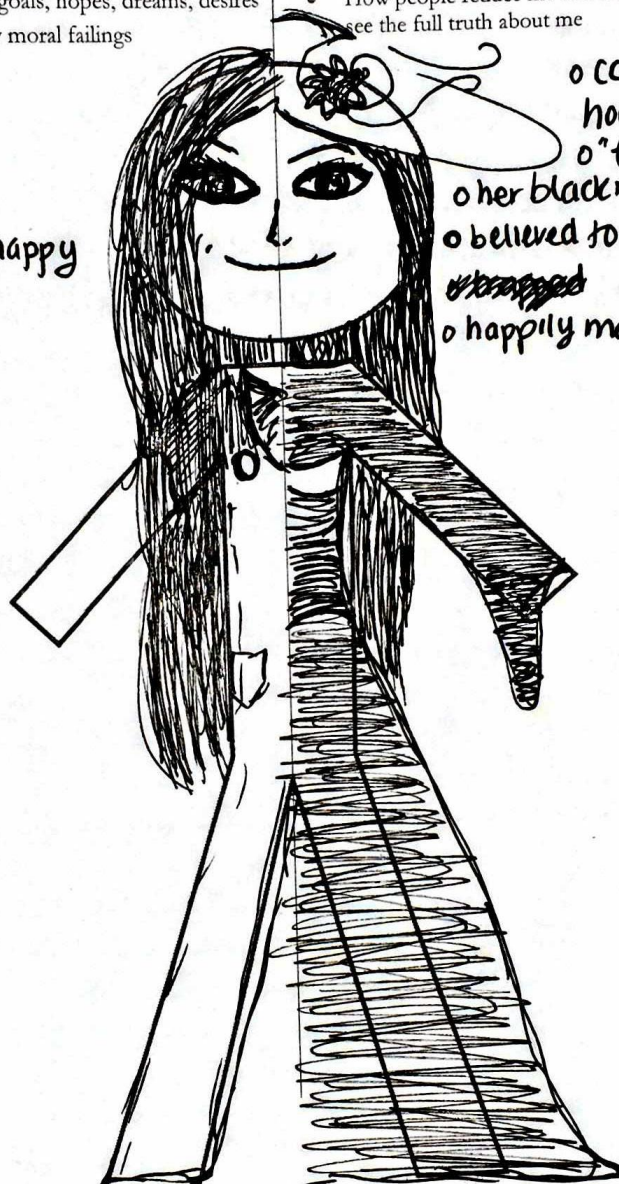
- What I feel to be true about myself
- What I hold important as a value, ethic, guiding principal or moral
- What I want for my life – goals, hopes, dreams, desires
- What I (might) feel are my moral failings

wild at heart
two sides of a coin
nature spoke to her
wanted to be free and happy

Who I'm not

- What other people believe to be true about me
- What the sociocultural norms of the day say about people like me
- How people reduce me to a single story, or fail to see the full truth about me

o calm, quiet housewife
o "the mayor's wife"
o her blackness defined her
o believed to be happy
~~o trapped~~
o happily married (first 2 marriages)



Use visuals/symbols, descriptions and quotations to create a portrait of each character, contrasting the way people see the character from the outside and the way the character sees herself from the inside. Pay particular attention to the way characters may be reduced to a "single story," the way outside people may ignore a person's complex motivations, or the way the sociocultural norms may set the character up for being misunderstood by the people around her.

'The Girl, "How Far She Went"'

Who I am

- What I feel to be true about myself
- What I hold important as a value, ethic, guiding principal or moral
- What I want for my life – goals, hopes, dreams, desires
- What I (might) feel are my moral failings

- frustrated about abandonment
- Just wants to be cared for
- childish but rightfully so.
- Caring

Who I'm not

- What other people believe to be true about me
- What the sociocultural norms of the day say about people like me
- How people reduce me to a single story, or fail to see the full truth about me

- rebellious
- uncaring
- self-centered



Use visuals/symbols, descriptions and quotations to create a portrait of each character, contrasting the way people see the character from the outside and the way the character sees herself from the inside. Pay particular attention to the way characters may be reduced to a "single story," the way outside people may ignore a person's complex motivations, or the way the sociocultural norms may set the character up for being misunderstood by the people around her.

The Grandmother, "How Far She Went"

Who I am

- What I feel to be true about myself
- What I hold important as a value, ethic, guiding principal or moral
- What I want for my life – goals, hopes, dreams, desires
- What I (might) feel are my moral failings

"She was always a listener."

"It all came to this! Solitary weeding. The sinful fumble of flesh, the fear, the listening for the return that never came."

Sad

"It was you or the dog,"

Rational / caring

"The men the girl has been riding with had the invading sort of eyes the woman had spent a lifetime bolting doors against."

Smart

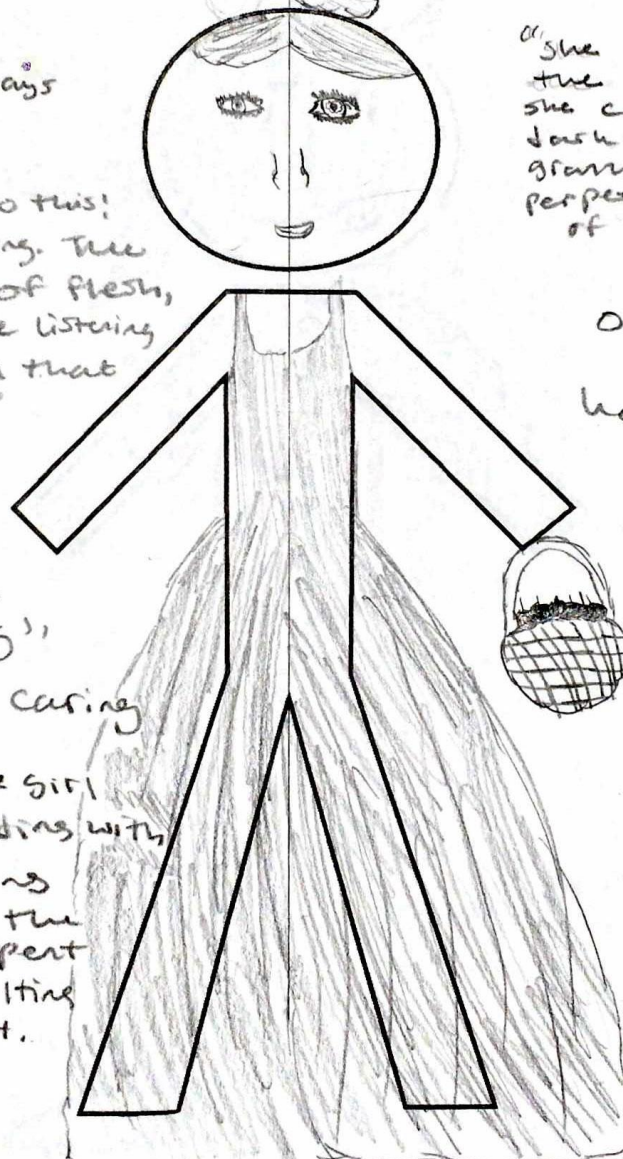
Who I'm not

- What other people believe to be true about me
- What the sociocultural norms of the day say about people like me
- How people reduce me to a single story, or fail to see the full truth about me

"She looked back at the house where she caught a the dark window her granny's face in it's perpetual eclipse of disappointment."

Old

hatefully difficult



Appendix I: Pair Discussion Activity for *Catcher in the Rye*

Holden's breakdown

To prepare for discussion tomorrow, go back and reread the following passages. Write several sentences of reflection/commentary for what you think contributes to Holden's despair and depression; also consider how growing up leads to feelings of isolation. What is your reaction to reading these passages a second time? Does it impact how you see Holden and his struggles?

New passage (just before page 45 in chapter 21, when Holden is in the men's room at the Wicker Bar)

When I finally got down off the radiator and went out to the hat-check room, I was crying and all. I don't know why, but I was. I guess it was because I was feeling so damn depressed and lonesome. Then, when I went out to the checkroom, I couldn't find my goddam check. The hat-check girl was very nice about it, though. She gave me my coat anyway. And my "Little Shirley Beans" record--I still had it with me and all. I gave her a buck for being so nice, but she wouldn't take it. She kept telling me to go home and go to bed. I sort of tried to make a date with her for when she got through working, but she wouldn't do it. She said she was old enough to be my mother and all. I showed her my goddam gray hair and told her I was forty-two--I was only horsing around, naturally. She was nice, though. I showed her my goddam red hunting hat, and she liked it. She made me put it on before I went out, because my hair was still pretty wet. She was all right.

I didn't feel too drunk any more when I went outside, but it was getting very cold out again, and my teeth started chattering like hell. I couldn't make them stop. I walked over to Madison Avenue and started to wait around for a bus because I didn't have hardly any money left and I had to start economizing on cabs and all. But I didn't feel like getting on a damn bus. And besides, I didn't even know where I was supposed to go. So what I did, I started walking over to the park. I figured I'd go by that little lake and see what the hell the ducks were doing, see if they were around or not, I still didn't know if they were around or not. It wasn't far over to the park, and I didn't have anyplace else special to go to--I didn't even know where I was going to sleep yet--so I went. I wasn't tired or anything. I just felt blue as hell.

Then something terrible happened just as I got in the park. I dropped old Phoebe's record. It broke-into about fifty pieces. It was in a big envelope and all, but it broke anyway. I damn near cried, it made me feel so terrible, but all I did was, I took the pieces out of the envelope and put them in my coat pocket. They weren't any good for anything, but I didn't feel like just throwing them away. Then I went in the park. Boy, was it dark.

Page 45 – “Finally I sat down on this bench”

Page 56 – “Oh, God, Phoebe, don't ask me”

Page 58 – “All right,” I said” + “That was about all I could think of, though”

Page 60 – “I thought it was ‘If a body catch a body’ I said.”

Page 66 – “Then, all of a sudden, I started to cry”

Page 78 – “I didn’t want to, but I started thinking about old Mr. Antolini...”

Page 80 – “Anyway, I kept walking and walking up Fifth Avenue”

Page 83 – “I went down by a different staircase”

Page 91 – “Go ahead then—I’ll be on this bench right over here” through end of chapter 25

Page 92-93 – all of chapter 26



Thesis/Dissertation Defense Outcome

Name Krista Bowen KSU ID 100802
 Email Kristabowen@gmail.com Phone Number 404-731-1604
 Program SMGE EDD English

Title Beyond Dichotomies: Acknowledging and Disrupting the Social Worlds of Tracked Schooling through Identity-Focused Literacy Practices

Thesis/Dissertation Defense:

Date 03/28/17

Passed



Failed



Passed With Revisions (attach revisions)

Signatures

Megana James
 Thesis/Dissertation Chair

3/28/17
 Date

Nita Parris
 Committee Member

3/28/17
 Date

Ben Di
 Committee Member

4/4/17
 Date

Committee Member

Date

Committee Member

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Nita Parris
 Program Director

3/28/17
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Ben Di
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4/10/17
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Graduate Dean

Date

Last Modified 05/26/16